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THE GREAT DUKE

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THE GREAT DUKE

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE"
"[illegible] THAT WON THE EMPIRE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME TWO

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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(*From a painting by* PAUL DELAROCHE.)

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THE GREAT DUKE

PART III.—THE PENINSULA (Continued)

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT SIEGES: I.—CIUDAD RODRIGO

"Ce diable de Wellington ramasse toujours la pomme perdu."
—NAPOLEON.

MASSÉNA had been recalled; his subtle, stubborn, and ruthless genius had failed in the great task Napoleon had committed to him. His place was taken by Marmont, a commander of a quite different type—a tactician rather than a strategist, swift and adroit; but, as events were to prove, neither swift enough nor adroit enough to match with Wellington.

Napoleon had never spared troops to Spain. In 1809 the number was reduced, by drafts for the Austrian war, from 335,000 to 226,000, but in 1810 it rose to 369,000; in the summer of 1811 it numbered 372,000 men, with 52,000 horses. It is true that towards the end of 1811 Napoleon was withdrawing

some of the best troops—notably 17,000 men of the Imperial Guard—from Spain, but he replaced them —in number at least—by new levies. Marmont, at Salamanca, in Wellington's front, had a force, including Dorsenne's division, of 70,000 men. Soult, in Andalusia, on his flank, had an army nearly as strong. And both generals seemed to be standing "at attention" until, according to rumour, Napoleon himself appeared in Spain.

Wellington, the most far-seeing and provident of all the great soldiers of history, took that possibility so seriously that he was busy extending enormously the famous lines of Torres Vedras, and multiplying their defences; amongst other details planning a great defensive canal, with depth sufficient to float ships of 300 tons, and linking two rivers together. Another retreat to the sea might be necessary, this time with Napoleon on his rear; and the lines must be made strong enough to baffle even his fierce genius.

But the immediate and urgent objective for both French and British was the two great frontier fortresses, Ciudad and Badajos. Napoleon, with his wizard-like penetration, guessed that Wellington meant to strike at them. A glance at the map shows why. These fortresses stand—Badajos to the south, Ciudad to the north—almost equi-distant from the Tagus, the distance betwixt them being roughly 100 miles. If this be taken as the base of an irregular triangle, of which Lisbon is the apex, the

line from Badajos to Lisbon, 120 miles, and the line from Ciudad to Lisbon, 180 miles, form the two containing sides. In the hands of the French these two fortresses were like pistols levelled at Lisbon; they made invasion on either route easy. It would be impossible for Wellington to advance into Spain and leave them in his rear. On the other hand, if he succeeded in capturing the fortresses they barred the two lines of approach to Lisbon, and gave him a secure base for an advance into Spain.

But there were even larger considerations which made necessary a stroke either at Ciudad or Badajos, or at both. "The whole fabric of the war," to quote Napier, was "falling to pieces." It seemed as if, both in Spain and Portugal, organised authority was at the point of dissolution. In Great Britain itself the mood of opinion hostile to the war, or weary of it, grew clamorous. Napoleon was beginning to pick his quarrel with the Czar, and was putting the final touches on the preparation for the Moscow campaign. Now if French power in Spain could not be shaken while Napoleon was fighting in the heart of Russia, then the cause of the Peninsula was indeed hopeless. It is all this which makes Napier describe the capture of Ciudad as "the first step in a plan which saved the Peninsula when nothing else could have saved it." It shifted the scene of war from Portugal to Spain. It made possible a direct and successful attack on the French armies in that

country. It was certain, therefore, that the struggle must rage round these two fortresses, and the attempts of the French to relieve them, and of the British to capture them, form a sort of bloody postscript to the story of Masséna's invasion of Portugal.

The French might well have felt themselves secure. Marmont, with 65,000 men, stood sentinel over Ciudad, and was almost within sound of its guns. Soult, with a force as great, watched Badajos; and Dorsenne could bring up his divisions to join either force. Wellington, who could put only 45,000 good troops—and these of mixed nationality—into his battle line, seemed little more than a nut within the jaws of a pair of nutcrackers. He had, too, many perplexities of his own. His supplies were scanty. The troops were commonly on half or quarter rations; sometimes they were without any bread for three days consecutively. Their pay was three months in arrears; their clothing was so patched that it was difficult to tell a regiment by its uniform. When the army was in cantonments on the Coa and the Agueda some 20,000 men were in hospital. Wellington suffered from a cruel and perpetual want of money. He was supplied, he complained, with only one-sixth part of the money necessary to keep the great machine going, and had to invent a scheme of paper money to escape bankruptcy. "I have clamoured for money, money, money, in every office to which I have had access," he wrote, "and to all my clamour

and all my arguments I have invariably received the same answer that 'the thing is impossible.'"

Spain was, for Wellington, a constant vexation. It was still, in 1811, as Sir John Moore described it in 1808, "without armies, generals, or government." Lisbon was for Wellington a nest of wasp-like intriguers, corrupt, disloyal, unreliable. "The Regency," says Napier, with bitter terseness, "acted on the maxim that 'a paternal government should not punish delinquencies in the public service.' To this they added a second: that the Portuguese could survive under privations of food which would kill men of another nation. With these two follies they excuse neglect, whenever denying the neglect becomes fatiguing." Wellington had only two real sources of help—the Portuguese troops who had been brought under British training, and the formless, planless, but unquenchable guerilla warfare in Spain.

Marmont and Soult on their part were beset with difficulties. The standing paradox of Spanish war crippled all their movements. To fight Wellington they must concentrate. But a great army could only be gathered at one point by the surrender of whole provinces to the guerillas; so that while they were moving to attack Wellington in their front a wasting guerilla war broke out in their rear. The peril of absolute famine, moreover, made any permanent concentration of the French forces impossible. To this must be added the fact that French generals

had no loyalty to each other. Had Napoleon been in Spain, French strategy would instantly have been in a unit; a single will would have directed all movements. But he was remote. He trusted none of his generals, and they mistrusted each other; and so a sustained and effective co-operation betwixt them was impossible.

Wellington, to his strong will and clear brain, added the energy which comes of a single and concentrated purpose. He was able to analyse all the forces arrayed against him; to detect their weakness and measure their limits; and so, with two armies, each stronger than his own, within striking distance, he calmly held his position, and planned a daring leap upon each of the two great fortresses in turn.

Beresford had twice attempted the siege of Badajos and had failed. Wellington at the end of May had renewed the siege. It lasted only a few days, and cost him 400 men and officers. He had amateur sappers, engineers without skill, and miners without tools, and his storming parties were flung upon the imperfect breaches under conditions which made even their fiery valour useless; and on July 1, 1811, the siege came to an end as the French were coming up at speed for its relief. The siege, in fact, was little better than an experiment; and Wellington, who, beyond almost any other great soldier in history, had the art of extracting the secret of success from

failure, learned in those few days and nights before Badajos, in 1811, the method af attack which he employed to such dreadful effect in 1812.

Wellington continued to blockade Badajos, proposing to fight Soult when he came up to raise the siege; but meanwhile Marmont was marching on Ciudad with a huge convoy, and Spencer, in Wellington's absence, was watching his approach. But Soult, instead of moving on to Badajos, with fine tactical skill swung to the right and pushed on to effect a junction with Marmont. On the 18th Soult and Marmont were in touch; on the 19th their united forces entered Badajos. Spencer joined Wellington, who took up his position on both sides of the Caya, with the plains which extend to Badajos stretching before him. Two great armies once more confronted each other. Soult and Marmont had a combined force of 64,000—7000 being cavalry; Wellington had less than 45,000 men, of whom only 28,000 were British.

It was a great opportunity for the French. They were stronger, both in infantry and artillery, than the British; they had twice as many cavalry, and the ground suited cavalry action. But Wellington's boldness puzzled the French marshals; the disposition of his troops made it difficult to measure his strength. His apparent weakness, they suspected, might be only a trap. Moreover, the memories of Busaco, of Sabugal, and of Albuera chilled their

imagination. While the French hesitated, and the days went past, Wellington persuaded Blake to make—or to feign—an attack on Seville; and on the mere rumour of that movement Soult instantly parted company with Marmont, and set his columns marching for Andalusia, while Marmont fell back to Truxillo.

Soult and Marmont were now parted from each other by an interval of nearly 100 miles; the bridge of Almarez was the link betwixt them, and it had been repaired, and strong forts erected for its defence, thus securing, it was hoped, easy and safe communication betwixt the two forces—a hope which Hill was to shatter rudely.

Wellington, meanwhile, was secretly busy with his preparations for leaping on Ciudad. A battering train of guns and mortars was lying at Lisbon. He embarked it, with a certain amount of ostentation, for Cadiz; when the ships were out of sight of land the guns, with their gunners, were transhipped to smaller craft, taken to Oporto, disembarked there, and carried up the Douro in boats. They were landed, and sixty-eight huge guns, with vast stores, were dragged across fifty miles of roadless mountain. Wellington now marched for Ciudad, reaching the Coa on August 8, and established a blockade of the fortress, fixing his headquarters at Guinaldo, and making Almeida his place of arms.

Marmont and Dorsenne, with a combined force

of 60,000 men, promptly moved to raise the blockade, and Wellington, who had not more than 35,000 men of all arms, placed himself in their path. He had played the game of bluff with success outside Badajos, and he tried that game afresh here. Marmont carried his convoy into Ciudad, and then broke roughly through the British line and struck at El Bodon, a steep triangular hill, girded with ravines, which held the 77th, a battalion of the 5th, with a Portuguese regiment, and four squadrons of cavalry, two of the 11th Light Dragoons, and two of the German Hussars. They were attacked by thirty squadrons of horse under Montbrun, supported by fourteen battalions of infantry. Wellington had summoned reinforcements from Guinaldo, but before they arrived the French attack was in full progress.

Montbrun's cavalry rode up the rough slope of the hill on three sides, bent on sweeping out of existence the tiny British force on the summit. They were smitten by a stinging musketry fire, as well as by grape from the Portuguese guns, but nothing stopped them. The moment they reached the crest, however, the handful of British cavalry rode fiercely upon them and drove them back; they did this, not once, but a dozen times. For an hour the gallant few in this way broke, and drove back, the furious many. At last Montbrun's horsemen, riding up for a final charge, broke through the centre, cut down the British gunners, and captured their pieces.

The triumphant French cavalry seemed to hold the hill; Major Ridge, however, flinging his companies into line, made a daring rush with the bayonet—infantry charging horsemen—and retook the guns. Picton, by this time, had brought up three regiments; but the French were not to be denied; the black massive columns of their infantry were coming into the fight, and Wellington directed Picton and Colville to fall back.

The 5th and 77th by this time were so reduced in numbers that they were formed in one square. The whole strength of the French cavalry was hurled on the tiny clumps of British infantry; but the sword was no match for the musket in such steady hands. For six miles the squares of British infantry, unshattered and indomitable, marched across the level country with the French cavalry raging about them, but never daring to ride home, till Guinaldo was reached.

"The multitudinous squadrons," to quote Napier, "rending the skies with their shouts, closed on the glowing squares like the falling edges of a burning crater, and were as instantly rejected, scorched, and scattered abroad; the rolling peal of musketry echoed through the hills, bayonets glittered at the edge of the smoke, and with firm and even step the British regiments came forth unscathed, as the holy men from the Assyrian's furnace."[1]

Wellington would now have fallen back with his whole force, but Craufurd, with the Light Divi-

[1] Napier, vol. iii. p. 339.

sion, had not come up, and, though urged by Murray, he would not abandon him. For thirty-six hours Wellington, with only 14,000 men, of whom less than 3000 were cavalry, stood in front of 60,000 French veterans with 100 guns; but Marmont did not strike. He drew out his columns on the plain, the Imperial Guard being amongst them, but hesitated to launch them against Wellington. At night Wellington drew his lines back, and Craufurd, with the Light Division, joined him. At the same moment, and under cover of the same darkness, Marmont was falling back, so deceived was he by Wellington's audacity. When Marmont learned of the great chance he had missed, and the escape of the Light Division, he is said to have cried, "Then Wellington's star, too, is bright."

Wellington's title to the fame of a great captain might almost be decided by the story of the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo. It was, it is true, only a second-rate fortress, held by a garrison of not more than 2000 men. But Wellington had only 35,000 troops of mixed nationality for the siege, while Marmont, with 40,000 of the best troops in the world, his headquarters within four days' march of Ciudad, was keeping watch over it, and Soult, with another 40,000, could strike at his communications as soon as he was committed to the siege. Thus the fortress had to be snatched from beneath

the guard of two armies, each stronger than the besieging force. There was no time for formal and scientific operations. Wellington lacked most of the appliances a siege requires: he had to capture the place by sheer swiftness and audacity. But the exact calculations of all the perils of the adventure, the far-reaching, secret preparations, the scorn of conventional methods, the swiftness and the shattering energy of the final stroke, the degree in which Wellington fired his whole army with his own stern purpose—all this makes the story of the siege unique.

Wellington chose the winter for his enterprise, not only because time was of value, but because the grassless pastures, the naked, wind-scourged plains, the muddy roads, would make quick movement on the part of the French army, which lived on the country through which it passed, almost impossible. On the nicest calculation, it would take Marmont twenty-four days to collect his forces and reach Ciudad; the siege must be begun and ended within that period. Masséna, in 1810, with 80,000 men, in fine weather, took more than a month to capture Ciudad, when it was held by a Spanish garrison; Wellington undertook, with less than 40,000 men, and in the depths of winter, to capture the same fortress in twenty-four days, when held by French troops. He achieved the feat, as a matter of fact, in twelve days.

Unfaltering swiftness, then, had to be the note of the siege; but there was in it none of the confusion too often born of swiftness. The "raw haste" which is "half-sister to delay" was abhorrent to Wellington's disciplined and methodical intellect. The audacity with which the siege was planned, the speed with which it was carried out, are almost less remarkable, indeed, than the sweep and thoroughness of Wellington's preparations for it. He had not, it is true, a sufficient staff of engineers; and native ingenuity and the fierce daring of his troops had to serve as substitutes for scientific methods. And, as we have seen, his heavy guns and siege train, brought secretly to Oporto, and carried in boats up the Douro, were being dragged across fifty miles of trackless hills, at the very moment when Wellington was offering battle to Soult, on the Caya, in the middle of June, 1811. At the same time, it may be added, Wellington was strengthening the lines of Torres Vedras. He was making retreat safe, in a word, at the very moment he was preparing for a daring advance. Another proof of his forecasting genius is to be found in the fact that even before the siege of Ciudad was begun, and while the fate of that siege was still undetermined, Wellington was preparing for a yet more desperate adventure—the dash at Badajos.

Wellington had practically no sappers or miners,

but for months hundreds of private soldiers and non-commissioned officers, chosen for their intelligence, were being drilled in the more primitive arts necessary for a siege. Eight hundred carts were built for the carriage of supplies, rivers were bridged, many miles of road across the hills were constructed. Hill, with 15,000 men, marched to Pontelegre so as to threaten, or seem to threaten, Andalusia, and keep Soult quiet. Then, on January 7, while the scuffling winds, bitter with hail and snow, beat upon his columns, Wellington crossed the Agueda and began the siege.

Ciudad resembles a rough triangle, with the Agueda, forming an impassable ditch along its south-western front, as its base. On the opposite side of the city, and serving as a shield to the apex of the flattened triangle, are two hog-backed ridges of rocks called the upper and the lower Teson, the higher and outer range only 600 yards from the ramparts. On this stood a strong post named Fort Francisco, formed by a palisaded redoubt, built like a massive girdle round a convent, with guns on the flat roof of the convent itself.

On the first night of the investment this strong post was carried. The task was given to Colborne, of the 52nd, one of the best soldiers, and almost the best regiment, in the army. Colborne was left to adopt his own methods. He detailed four companies to line the crest of the glacis, and keep down the

fire of the garrison; explained to his captains, in minutest detail, what each was to do, and then took forward his other companies in silence to the attack. When fifty yards from the redoubt, he gave the word, "Double quick!" and the fort was carried in twenty minutes from the time the storming party moved to the attack.

Wellington himself, Barnard of the 95th, and Craufurd—who all knew that the fate of the siege probably hung on Colborne's success—were watching the dark outline of the fort. A sudden tumult, the rattle of musketry, the shouts of contending men, told the attack had begun. A few swift, tense minutes passed, then, loud and strong above all other sounds, rose the watchword, "England! St. George!" It was answered by a terrific shout from the whole Light Division, which was under arms near. "When they heard the cheer," as Colborne himself told the tale afterwards, "Barnard, unable to restrain his emotion, threw himself on the ground in the vehemence of his delight, so that General Craufurd, who was at a little distance, and did not see who it was, exclaimed, 'What's that drunken man doing?' As soon as the fort fell," Colborne adds, "I despatched a soldier to Lord Wellington, who had been looking on all the time. This soldier ran up to him in great excitement, and said, 'I've taken the fort, sir!' Wellington replied, 'Oh, you've taken the fort, have you? Well, I'm glad to hear it,' and got up and

rode away." He could take success, as he met disaster, with perfect coolness.

The siege moved swiftly. In spite of blowing winds and bitter cold and the angry fire of the besieged, the trenches were pushed on. On the 13th the batteries were armed, and by the evening of the 14th, twenty-five heavy guns were smiting at the nearer ramparts. The French answered with the fire of more than fifty pieces. All through the night the duel of the guns raged, and the thunder of their iron voices, rolling in far-heard waves of sound through the hill passes, awoke strange and lingering echoes, till, as one good soldier, with a touch of the poet in him, who listened to it, says, "It seemed as if, through the darkness, the hills that girdled the doomed city were lamenting over its fall."

By January 19 two breaches were practicable, one in the *fausse braie*—a sort of platform jutting out midway on the face of the true rampart—and a greater breach in the rampart itself, and Wellington, sitting on the reverse of one of the advanced trenches, wrote in pencil, and to the accompaniment of the bellowing guns, the orders for the attack. "Ciudad Rodrigo," he wrote, "*must* be stormed this evening." The best fighting regiments—the men of the "Fighting Third" and of the Light Division—with Pack's Portuguese, were to do the business. Two brigades of the 3rd—one led by Mackinnon, and the other by Campbell—were to assail the great breach,

Mackey, of the 88th, leading the forlorn hope, and Manners, of the 74th, the storming party, consisting of 500 volunteers. The smaller breach was to be assailed by the men of the Light Division, Gurwood leading the forlorn hope, and George Napier the stormers. There was to be a false attack by Pack's Portuguese on the St. Jago gate, at the opposite side of the town; while the light company of the 83rd, with some Portuguese, were to attack an outwork in front of the castle, so as to destroy the fire of two guns which swept the breach.

A gun was to give the signal for the attack, and all the regiments were in their places ready, like eager hounds held in leash, for the leap on the city. Wellington himself was pointing out the lesser breach to George Napier, when suddenly a shout broke out in the British trenches far to the right. It acted on the impatient stormers like the touch of fire to a powder magazine. An answering wave of shouts, a tumult of stormy sound, ran along the zigzag of the trenches, and in a moment, and from every point, the assault was in progress. The dark city broke into answering tumult. Its guns thundered through the darkness on the columns of charging British, its ramparts were outlined in red fire by the flame of musketry volleys.

Picton's regiments swept with a rush—outrunning even their own forlorn hope—over the glacis, across the ditch, and up the steep slope of broken stones

towards the breach. They were smitten with musketry fire from either side. The rough incline burst into flame under their feet as they ran, for it was sown thick with exploding hand-grenades; but they never paused. They reached the breach, and there was a moment's check, while two French guns, the gunners toiling with frantic energy at their task, poured blasts of grape into the storming column, the British being at that moment so near that the flame of the gun seemed to scorch them.

"None would go back on either side," says Napier, "and yet the British could not get forward, and men and officers falling in heaps choked up the passage, which from minute to minute was raked with grape from the guns flanking the top of the breach at the distance of a few yards; thus striving, and trampling alike upon the dead and the wounded, these brave men maintained the combat."

Nothing availed, however, to repel the fiery valour of the attack. The head of the storming column broke through, and, at the same moment, a mine beneath the breach was exploded. The sudden blast of flame slew Mackinnon and those about him; it rent the stream of the attack in two, and its dreadful sound for a moment seemed to hush the whole tumult of the assault. But in a moment the storming column swept up, and through, and the breach was won.

The attack of the Light Division on the lesser breach was as swift and resolute. A number of Portuguese, carrying bags of hay, were to run with

the storming party and throw the bags into the ditch. But the stormers outran the Portuguese; they reached the crest of the glacis, and scorning delay, jumped down the scarp, a depth of eleven feet.

There was, in the blackness, some confusion as to the point of attack. The forlorn hope placed their ladders too far to the left; the storming party, headed by Napier, took the true line to the breach. This was a gap in the wall so narrow that a gun placed across it formed a barrier. Napier, as he climbed towards it, was struck by a grape shot and fell, but he called on his men to "trust to their bayonets," and with one loud shout the men of the Light Division broke through that tiny crevice. They instantly wheeled to the right and left, and the 43rd, running along the rampart, took the French holding the great breach in flank and rear exactly at the moment when Picton's regiments broke through. Both the other attacks had succeeded, and Ciudad Rodrigo was won.

The spirit of the attack on the breaches is shown in the instructions given by its leaders. Neither of them would allow the storming parties to load. Said Picton, "I do not mean to spend any powder this evening, we will do business with cowld iron." The 88th had listened in dead silence to Picton's words, and they answered with a terrific shout. George Napier gave exactly the same order, though in

slightly better English, to the storming party of the Light Division.

Many of the men who took part in that fierce rush on the city have written the story of their experiences, and these make curiously interesting literature. George Napier, who led the storming party at the lesser breach, Grattan, of the 88th, who took part in the fight at the great breach, and Donaldson, who was a private of the 88th, all tell their story. Grattan thus describes the preparations by the men in the regiments for the assault:

"It was now five o'clock in the afternoon, and darkness was approaching fast, yet no order had arrived that we were to take a part in the contest. . . . Our attention was attracted by the sound of music; we all stood up, and pressed forward to a ridge, a little in our front; . . . it would be impossible for me to convey an adequate idea of our feelings when we beheld the 43rd Regiment, preceded by their band, going to storm the left breach. They were in the highest spirits, but without the slightest appearance of levity in their demeanour. . . . They had no knapsacks—their firelocks were slung over their shoulders—their shirt-collars were open, and there was an indescribable something about them that impressed the lookers-on with admiration and awe. . . . There was no shouting or huzzaing, no boisterous bravadoing, no unbecoming language; in short, every one seemed to be impressed with the seriousness of the affair entrusted to his charge. Any interchange of words was to this effect: 'Well, lads, mind what you're about to-night;' or 'We'll meet in the town by and by.' . . . The regiment at length passed us, and we stood gazing after it as long as the rear platoon continued in sight: the music grew fainter every moment, until at last it died away altogether; they had no drums, and there was a melting sweetness in the sounds that touched the heart.

"The first syllable uttered after this scene was, 'And are we to be left behind?' The interrogatory was scarcely put, when the word 'Stand to your arms!' answered it. The order was promptly obeyed, and a breathless silence prevailed when our commanding officer, in a few words, announced to us that Lord Wellington had directed our division to carry the grand breach. The soldiers listened to the communication with silent earnestness, and immediately began to disencumber themselves of their knapsacks. . . . Each man arranged himself for the combat in such manner as his fancy or the moment would admit of—some by lowering their cartridge-boxes, others by turning theirs to the front in order that they might the more conveniently make use of them; others unclasping their stocks or opening their shirt-collars, and others oiling their bayonets.

"It was by this time half-past six o'clock; the evening was piercingly cold, and the frost was crisp on the grass; there was a keenness in the air that braced our nerves at least as high as concert pitch. We stood quietly to our arms, and told our companies off by files, sections, and sub-divisions; the sergeants called over the rolls—not a man was absent." [1]

As they moved forward to the assault, Grattan, who took part in the fight at the breach, found time to look round and note the faces of the men as they were lit up from time to time by the flashes of the French guns. "Every face," he says, "wore a look of severity . . . such as I never before witnessed." He was near Mackinnon at the moment of the explosion which killed him. "The men," he says, "were so stunned by the shock, or wounded with the stones which were hurled forth by the explosion, that they were insensible to the situation. Of these I was one, being so close to the magazine

[1] "With the Connaught Rangers," p. 155.

that I was quite overpowered." His sergeant-major saved him from being trampled to death, by holding him up for a moment till he recovered consciousness.

A little cluster of five French gunners stood round their piece at the head of the breach and kept up an incessant fire. To race up to the iron lips of that gun needed desperate courage. "A sergeant of the 88th, named Brazil," says Grattan, "called out to his two companions, Swan and Kelly, to unscrew their bayonets and follow him; the three men passed the trench in a moment, and engaged the French cannoniers hand to hand; a terrific but short combat was the consequence." The fight of three against five was nothing less than Homeric, but the three won.

Many Homeric combats, indeed, took place in the passion of that fierce night assault, and Grattan describes some of them with uncomfortable fidelity of detail.

George Napier's story of how he led the stormers of the Light Division is sufficiently familiar, but is well worth being put on record here. Craufurd told him to get a hundred volunteers from each regiment in the division; this was to be the storming party. "I went," he said, "to three regiments, the 43rd, 52nd, and rifle corps, and said, 'Soldiers, I have the honour to be appointed to the command of the storming party which is to lead the Light Division to the assault of the small breach. I want one hundred volunteers from each regiment; those who

will go with me come forward.' Instantly there rushed out nearly half the division, and we were obliged to take them at chance."

"When the moment for attack came," says Napier, "Lord Wellington sent for Colonel Colborne and myself, and pointed out, as well as the light would permit, the spot where the foot of the breach was. He said to me, 'Now do you understand the way you are to lead, so as to arrive at the breach without noise or confusion?' I answered, 'Yes,' and we then went back to the regiment. Just before I moved on, some staff officer present said, 'Why, your men are not loaded; why do you not make them load?' I replied, 'Because if we do not do the business with the bayonet, without firing, we shall not be able to do it at all, so I shall not load.' I heard Lord Wellington, who was close by, say, 'Let him alone: let him go his own way.'"[1]

Then followed the rush.

"Lieutenant Gurwood with his party having, owing to the darkness of the night, gone too much to the left, was employed in placing ladders on the unbreached face of the bastion, when he got a shot in the head; but immediately recovering his feet he came up to me, and at that moment the engineer . . . called out, 'You are wrong; this way to the right is the breach;' and Captain Ferguson, myself, Gurwood and the rest of the officers, and such men as were nearest the Engineer officer, rushed on, and we all mounted the breach together, the enemy pouring a heavy fire on us. When about two-thirds up, I received a grape shot which smashed my elbow and great part of my arm;

1 "Life of Sir George Napier," p. 204.

and on falling, the men, who thought I was killed, checked for a few moments, and forgetting they were not loaded commenced snapping their muskets. I immediately called out, 'Recollect you are not loaded; push on with the bayonet.' Upon this the whole gave a loud 'hurrah,' and driving all before them, carried the breach, and wheeling as I had given orders to the right and left, soon drove off the enemy. . . . During all this time the troops of the Light Division kept pouring into the place through the breach, and I kept cheering them on as well as I could, but I got terribly bruised and trampled upon in the confusion and darkness. However, very soon "Victory! England for ever!' was shouted by thousands, and then I knew all was right, and I waited patiently in the breach till all had passed."[1]

Craufurd fell in the assault. He had just rejoined the Light Division, and when he came up to the storming party the men, peering through the darkness, recognised his figure, and broke into a wild shout. He was a fit leader for such men, and for such an adventure. His last words to them were, "Now, lads, to the breach." He led them in person to the crest of the glacis, and stood there, a stern, impressive figure, cheering the files as they passed him.

The French, leaning over the rampart, almost within touch, were shooting furiously, but Craufurd stood unmoved till a bullet struck him, and he fell shot through the body. That stern spirit grew strangely tender under the shadow of death. He told his aide-de-camp, Shaw Kennedy, who stooped over him, to tell his wife he "was sure they would

[1] "Life of Sir George Napier," pp. 216–18.

meet in heaven." He was carried to the rear, but did not die till the next day. He sent for Wellington, and begged his forgiveness for any failure of duty. To many of his officers, too, he sent frequent and strongly affectionate messages of farewell.

A grave was dug for him in the rough slope of the great breach itself, and his body was carried by six sergeants of the Light Division to his grave along the very path by which, only a few hours before, the British stormers had swept. An eye-witness tells how he saw strange tears running down the grim faces of the veterans of the Light Division as they stood round the grave of their fierce leader, at once so feared and so trusted. Mackinnon, too, greatly loved by his Highlanders, found a grave near that of Craufurd on the rugged slope where he had fallen.

Ciudad cost Wellington nearly 1300 men and officers, of whom one-half fell during the actual assault. But it was a great prize. It yielded vast stores of ammunition, a whole battering train, fifty guns, and 1500 prisoners. Not the least gain of the siege was its effect on public opinion in England and the Peninsula, and on the French. General Léry, writing from Seville, on April 20, says, "All our calculations are upset. . . . Wellington has seized this place under the beards of two corps amounting together to 80,000 men."

Marmont had moved for the relief of Ciudad when

he heard of the siege, but moved too late and too slowly. On January 16 he announced that he was about to set out with 60,000 men to raise the siege. "Expect events," he added, "as fortunate and as glorious for the French army." But on the 19th Ciudad had fallen, and the correspondence of Marmont with Napoleon for some time is rich in bewildered explanations of the disaster:

"Your Highness," he wrote to Marshal Berthier on March 2, "accuses me of being the cause of the capture of Ciudad Rodrigo. I hold that I had nothing to do with it; Rodrigo was taken because the garrison was too weak, and because the commander-in-chief of the army in the north [Dorsenne] was equally destitute of vigilance and foresight. I could not keep my eye on the place as I was separated from it by a chain of mountains and by the desert created in the valley of the Tagus by the six months' occupation by the army."

Napoleon had required him to keep in constant touch with the British: "You ought to make prisoners every day with your advance guards." To this Marmont replied, "His Majesty then is not aware that, from the nature of things, and because of the absolute want of subsistence, there are always at least twenty leagues between the English advanced post and ours, and that this interval is occupied by guerillas; so that, if I detach large bodies, they die of hunger; if small ones, they are compromised." This was, indeed, for the French, the one changeless embarrassing condition of all their campaigns.

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT SIEGES: II.—BADAJOS

"A combat so fiercely fought, so terribly won, so dreadful in all its circumstances, that posterity can scarcely be expected to credit the tale."—NAPIER.

THE fall of Ciudad Rodrigo sent far-running vibrations throughout the whole Peninsula. The mere wind of the siege had set both Soult and Marmont marching to its relief; Napoleon, on hearing the news, arrested the march of the detachment of the Imperial Guards which were returning to France. On the tidings of its capture, Soult fell back into Andalusia and Marmont to Salamanca, when he instantly, and with anxious speed, began fortifying that city.

The question was: What would Wellington do next? Soult feared he might march on Seville, Marmont was sure he would leap on Badajos. Napoleon regarded this as incredible. "You must suppose the English mad," he wrote, "to imagine that they will march on Badajos, leaving you at Salamanca; that is, leaving you in a situation to get to Lisbon before them. If Wellington moves

towards Badajos, do not interfere with him, but march straight upon Almeida . . . and you will soon bring him back."

Wellington knew, but Napoleon never learned, how impossible it was for French armies to co-operate for long in a common scheme either of offence or defence. And he had made his choice. He would commit the heroic "madness" which Napoleon held to be incredible; he would strike at Badajos. And he entered upon the adventure with the same exact calculation of time and method, and the same far-running preparation, which marked his attack on Ciudad. He fell on Ciudad in mid-winter, since the frost-hardened soil made movement for him easy, while the nakedness of the country would make it, for the relieving army—being French, and supporting itself by French methods—very difficult. He commenced operations against Badajos in the spring-time, as the furious rains would swell all the streams and block the passes with torrents, and so retard the march of Marmont to relieve the fortress. And the swift, strong, masterful brain, that looked before and after, had been assembling what was necessary for the siege of Badajos before that of Ciudad was even begun.

Early in December all the parts of a great pontoon bridge had been brought from Lisbon to Elvas. The guns for the siege, by a similar trick to that employed at Ciudad, were shipped at Lisbon for a destination

which would rouse no suspicions, transhipped at sea, carried up the river Sedao, and then dragged with immense toil across unfrequented hill-tracks to Badajos. The trouble was that the guns actually brought were scarcely worth the trouble of bringing them. Amongst them were Spanish guns as old as the Armada, and Russian pieces whose bore was too large for English shot. At Elvas 2000 men were employed preparing siege-material.

Wellington maintained his headquarters on the Coa till the last moment, in order to deceive the French; he distributed a covering army of 30,000, under Hill and Graham, so as to guard every line by which a relieving force could approach; he stirred up the guerillas to keep Soult quiet in Andalusia. Then he put his columns in march from the Agueda to the Guadiana.

That march certainly seemed to have in it a touch of the "madness" of which Napoleon spoke. It left the road to Portugal open to Masséna. His flank, during the whole march, was open to attack. He might find Soult drawn up in some strong position in his front and barring his advance. But Wellington had read with sure judgment all the factors of the problem, and he pushed on, through the wildest weather, across flooded plains and swollen streams, reached the Guadiana on March 16th, threw a bridge across the river, was in front of Badajos on the 17th, and broke ground for the siege the same

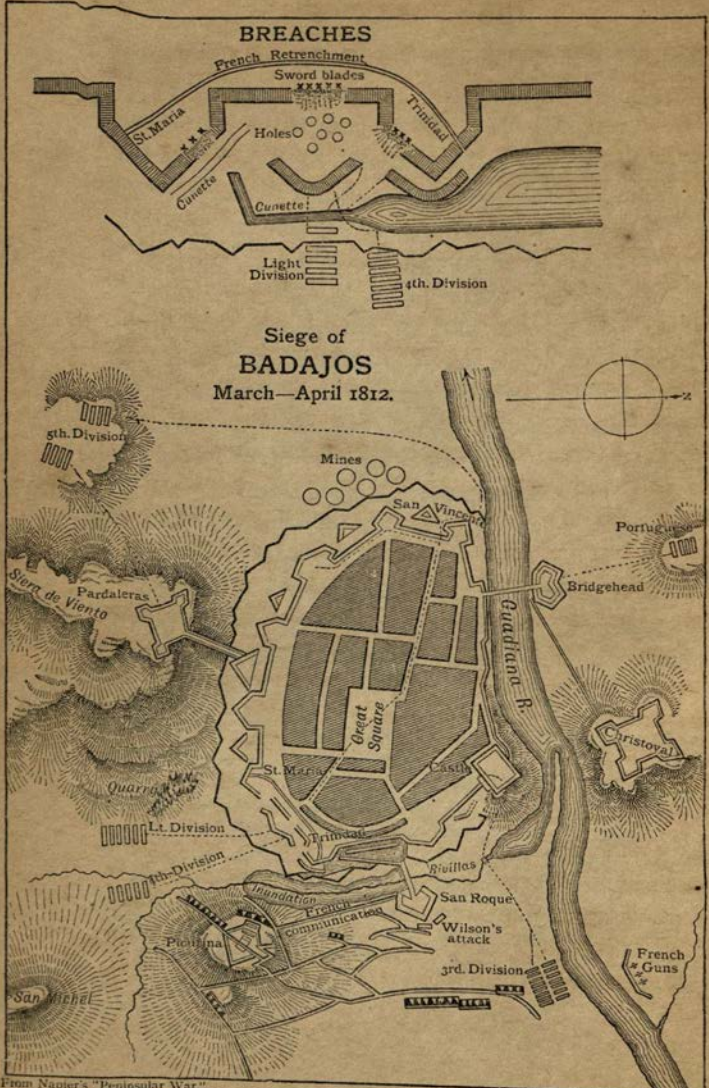
night. If he was entering on a perilous adventure, he certainly moved to it with a sort of planetary impact and swiftness.

Grattan, of the 88th, tells with what stern gladness the rank and file of the army splashed on their way along muddy roads, and under incessant rains, to Badajos. It was not merely a desire to repeat the success of Ciudad which quickened their march. Somehow, Badajos was, for the men in the ranks, the most hated town in Spain. The fact that it had been given to the French by Spanish treachery perhaps explains that hate. Many good British lives had already been paid, and more must be given, to undo that treachery. The expectation of plunder, too—all the ignoble stir of awakened appetite—quickened their steps.

Wellington began the siege with what was, for him, a certain unaccustomed parade. Blakeney, in his "Autobiography of a Boy in the Peninsula War,"[1] says:

"All the troops being assembled, generals and commanding officers inspected their brigades and regiments in review order. . . . The colours of each regiment proudly, though scantily, floated in the breeze; they displayed but very little embroidery. Scarcely could the well-earned badges of the regiments be discerned; yet their lacerated condition, caused by the numberless wounds which they received in battle, gave martial dignity to their appearance and animated every British breast with national pride. The review being terminated, a

[1] P. 259.


BREACHES
French Retrenchment
Sword blades
St. Maria
Trinidad
Holes
Cunette
Cunette
Light Division
4th. Division
Siege of
BADAJOS
March—April 1812.
5th. Division
Mines
San Vincente
Portuguese
Bridgehead
Sierre de Viento
Pardaleras
Guadiana R.
Great Square
Christoval
St. Maria
Castle
Quarry
Lt. Division
Trinidad
Rivillas
7th Division
Inundation
French communication
San Roque
Wilson's attack
Picurina
3rd. Division
French Guns
San Michel
From Napier's "Peninsular War."
Walker & Boutall sc.

signal was given for each corps to proceed to that spot of ground which they were destined to open. The whole moved off. All the bands by one accord played the same tune, which was cheered with shouts that bore ominous import and appeared to shake Badajos to its foundation. The music played was the animating national Irish air, St. Patrick's Day."

Perhaps Wellington, who profoundly understood what may be called the moral factors in war, desired by that parade to string to a yet fiercer note the spirit of his soldiers. For Badajos was very unlike Ciudad. Its defences were stronger. A certain prestige rested on its massive and gloomy walls, for the British had besieged it twice already, and had failed. It was held by a garrison 5000 strong, made up of detachments from the forces of Marmont, of Soult, and of Jourdan; so that the honour of three armies was pledged for its succour. Its commander, Phillipon, was a soldier of genius, known to be of great skill in defence; and he had laid to heart the lessons of the two previous sieges. He had made Badajos strong at the points where these had shown them to be weak.

The city stands in the angle formed by two rivers —the Guadiana and the Rivillas—on a spur of the Toledo Range. It is in the shape of an orange, with the Guadiana making an impassable barrier on the northern face, and the Rivillas curving round it on its eastern end, and serving as a gigantic wet-ditch. The outer zone of its defences was formed by five great fortified, and connected, outposts. The

western extremity of this zone offered the least natural difficulties, but the engineers declared they had not artillery of sufficient range for that attack; and Wellington determined to seize the Picurina, a massive redoubt, girdled with ditches, which served as an outpost to the defences on the south-eastern curve of the city.

It was difficult to form trenches and construct batteries in soil sodden with rain, which lapsed into a condition of liquid mud when disturbed. Furious rains continually swamped the trenches; on March 23 the swollen river broke the pontoon bridge, so that provisions for the besiegers could not be brought over.

Wellington, however, sternly pushed on his operations. The bridge was restored, and on March 25, 500 men of the "Fighting Third," in three columns, were flung on the Picurina. The attack was daring in the highest degree; but the defence was stubborn. The squat redoubt spat fire from every front; the guns from the city joined in the stormy chorus. The fight had two armies as spectators; and in the light of flashing guns and exploding rockets, dark figures could be seen furiously struggling on the ramparts of Picurina, for the stormers had climbed up, and were fighting hand to hand. Phillipon sent out a battalion to help his outpost; but this was roughly beaten back by the supports of the attacking party. He had confidently reckoned that Picurina would

hold the besiegers back for at least six days; it was carried in an hour. But 316 officers and men, out of an attacking force of 500, were killed and wounded. This fierce and bloody episode showed the spirit both of the besiegers and the besieged.

The British now were able to establish their batteries within 300 yards of the walls. They pushed their trenches forward with energy, and for twelve days the roar of guns answering to guns never ceased. Phillipon used every art to delay the siege. Frequent sallies were attempted; he planted guns in ingeniously new positions, so as to rake the trenches of the besiegers; floating batteries were launched on the Guadiana to take them in their rear. But through it all the dogged British pushed on their attack. Soult was coming up from Cordova; Marmont was across the Portuguese border. Time grew short, and the siege was urged vehemently. On April 3 Soult and Drouet had joined forces, and Wellington drew Graham and Hill by concentric marches towards Albuera, and contemplated joining them with his remaining forces and fighting a great battle there, leaving two divisions to continue the siege. But Soult lingered at Llarena. He was still there on the morning of the 5th, when Wellington's engineers declared the breaches to be practicable. To Wellington's eye, however, the walls were yet too formidable, and the breaches too imperfect, to make a successful assault

possible, and he turned his guns on another point, the Trinidad curtain, and tore with their shot a gap in its front; then he resolved to attack.

Eighteen thousand of the best soldiers in the world were to be flung at a given signal upon the doomed city. Picton, with the "Fighting Third," was to assault the castle, whose walls, eighteen to twenty-four feet in height, were without a break. Leith, with the 5th Division, was to assault San Vincente, at the western extremity of the town, where the parapets were uninjured by gun-fire, but had been mined. Some regiments of the 4th Division were to carry the new breach in the Trinidad curtain. The strength of the assault, however, was directed against the great breach in the Trinidad, and a lesser breach in Santa Maria. The Light Division, under Barnard, was to storm the latter; the 4th Division, under Colville, was to carry the great breach.

Here were five attacks. At half-past seven the breaching guns were to cease their fire, and from five points 18,000 soldiers were to leap on Badajos. Later orders changed the moment of attack to ten o'clock, but the gunners in the batteries did not know of the change in the hour, and ceased firing at the time first appointed. So for two hours a strange silence lay about the imperilled city, and Phillipon used those hours with deadly effect in multiplying his defences at what he knew would be the points of attack.

Of the five assaults, two were mere escalades; three were launched at actual breaches, made in the massive walls of the city, after ten days' incessant cannonading. And the attacks on the three breaches failed, while the two assaults on the uninjured walls succeeded! Jones, whose "History of British Sieges in the Peninsula" is a classic, says that "this makes the story of Badajos without a parallel in the history of sieges."

It is true, of course, that the storming columns of the Light and 4th Divisions did not carry the breaches. Of the thousands of brave men, gallantly led, who leaped into the black ditch at the foot of the breach, and strove for two dreadful hours to climb that rough slope, only two, as a matter of fact, reached the parapet and got through. They were private soldiers, and their dead bodies lay upon the parapet the next morning. But below the breaches, lying thick on the rough slopes, and thicker still on the ravelin and in the muddy ditch below—within an area, perhaps, of a single acre of ground—were lying, as the next day broke, from 1200 to 1500 dead or dying men.

Never perhaps in the whole history of war was such a wave of furious valour flung at a single point of attack, and flung in vain, as on the dreadful breach at Badajos. But, though the storming parties failed to carry the breaches, yet the fire, and the persistency of their attack, main-

tained without cessation for hours, fixed the attention and strength of the garrison at that point, and so made possible the success of the escalading parties at the castle, and at San Vincente.

It is easy, when set in the light of all the knowledge which is supplied by the narratives of the survivors, to tell why the attack on the breaches failed. It was a night attack, with all the confusion possible to darkness. The three storming parties got mixed, and lost direction and leadership. The third breach, as a matter of fact, was hardly assailed at all. In the great ditch in front of the Trinidad bastion there was a high and broken ravelin; the stormers climbed its rugged front, believing it to be the lower slopes of the breach itself; but when they crowded its top, there gaped before them, deep and black and wide, yet another ditch. That broke the rush of the stormers. The men clung to the summit of the ravelin, and began to fire back at the parapets. The leaders of the storming parties leapt into the farther ditch, and tried to set the crowd in motion up the breach, but by this time it *was* a crowd. They could not make themselves heard. Sir Harry Smith, who was in that mad scene, puts his finger on the secret of the failure when he says, "We were broken, and carried no weight with us, although every soldier was a hero."

A column, to be effective, must be a disciplined,

close-knitted mass, swayed by a single will, and smiting with concentrated impact at some chosen point. Nothing could have arrested the impact of three such columns, each launched under clear direction at a separate breach. But they lost sight of their mark; they clashed together; they became a mob—a mob of men who could die, and *did* die, but who could not conquer.

The story of how these doomed columns moved to the assault is a tale which must still stir the blood of every reader. Grattan, in his "Connaught Rangers," describes the temper of the men as the hour of the assault drew near.

"The spirits of the soldiers," he says, "which no fatigue could damp, rose to a frightful height; there was a certain something in their bearing that told plainly that they had suffered fatigues, which they did not complain of, and had seen their comrades and officers slain while fighting beside them without repining; now *that* they had a momentary license to think, every fine feeling vanished, and plunder and revenge took their place."

That was not a very noble mood of feeling, but at least it guaranteed hard fighting.

On the 6th the assault was postponed till the next day. "For once," writes Grattan, "I saw the men dejected. It was not the dejection of fear, but of disappointment. Some of the most impetuous broke out into violent language, others abused the engineers. Many threw the blame of delay upon the generals who commanded in the

trenches." The men, in brief, were fiercely eager for the assault, and were chafed into fury by delay. Here is a picture again of the aspect they wore when ready for the actual rush on the breaches:

"It was twenty-five minutes past nine; the soldiers unencumbered with their knapsacks, their stocks off, their shirt-collars unbuttoned, their trousers tucked up to the knee, their tattered jackets, so worn out as to render the regiment they belonged to barely recognisable, their huge whiskers and bronzed faces; but above all, their self-confidence, devoid of boast or bravado, gave them the appearance of what they in reality were—an invincible host."

The signal was given; the men leaped from the trenches; the columns of the two divisions had reached the glacis opposite the breach; the forlorn hope and storming party of the Light Division were already down in the ditch, when a burst of musketry at the castle showed the attack had been begun there. Then instantly the breach and ramparts in front were lit up with fire, the sudden burst of flame lighting up on the one side the ramparts crowded with dark figures, but bright with glittering arms, and on the other the red columns, deep and broad, of the British. At that moment the channel of the ditch, black with depth and crowded with stormers, exploded into flame. It had been sown thick with shells and powder barrels, and turned in this way into a mine, and the storming parties in it were destroyed at a

breath. "It was," says Napier, "as if the very earth had been rent asunder and its central fires were bursting upwards uncontrolled."

The columns of the Light Division had by this time reached the edge of the great ditch, and then—such was their daring—they answered the roar of the explosion with a shout that matched even its sound, and leaped into the smoking depth before them. The men of the 4th Division at that moment came running up to their right and plunged into it with equal fury. Where, however, they attempted to cross, the centre of the wide floor of the ditch had a deep and broad cut filled with water. It was a deadly trap. The leading files of the 4th plunged into this, and more than a hundred of the Fusiliers, "the men of Albuera," were drowned. But, without a pause, the stormers swung to their left, struck the unfinished ravelin, and crowded to its top. "This work," says Blakeney, "had been a good deal raised during the siege, and was mistaken for the breach, which in its unfinished state it much resembled." This was now crowded by the men of both divisions, but a deep precipice and a wet ditch still stretched between them and the breaches. In a fury of wrath the men lifted their muskets and fired back at the crowded ramparts, at that moment scorching them with musketry volleys. The firing spread through the whole mass of the stormers. No voice in the tumult of sound could stop it; and from that

point control of the assault was practically impossible.

The din of voices and guns, big and little, was maddening. Individual officers, with fierce gestures, would gather the men immediately about them, and lead them clambering up the breach, but there was no single will, or voice, that could knit those thousands of shouting and shooting men into a single movement, or direct them against a single point.

Phillipon had used every device known in war to make the gap in his massive walls impassable. The slope of the breach was, in its upper part, covered with loose and slippery planks, set thick with sharpened points bent upward, like the barbs of a fish-hook. Across the narrow breach were beams chained fast, and set thickly with sharpened sword-blades. Behind was a pile of sandbags, across which the French, packed thick, shot securely and fast. Grattan says—no doubt with a touch of exaggeration—that behind these dreadful beams, horrent with sword blades, "trenches were cut sufficient for the accommodation of 3000 men who stood tier above tier, each with a little pile of loaded muskets beside him." But through even that triple barrier of steel and of darting flame the storming columns, if their original impulse and direction had been preserved, would have broken, so fierce was their rush; but all direction had been lost.

To those who watched the sight from the trenches, a ragged, broken, swaying wave of figures would every few minutes sweep up the breach to the very edge of the bar of angry fire at its summit. They were like leaves driven by a whirlwind, and they seemed to shrivel like leaves. William Napier has told the whole story in undying prose in his "History of the Peninsular War," but in a letter written on April 29, three weeks after the assault, he condenses the story into half-a-dozen lines.

"For three hours and a half the Light Division were in the ditch and on the breach in close order, exposed to the fire of 4000 men at twenty yards from them, while artillery from the flanks, and shells, stones, fire-balls, and beams were poured upon them incessantly, and yet not one man left his post, or for a moment gave up efforts to tear away the obstacles that were laid across the breach; every officer and man has received two or three wounds each."

The actual time expended in the struggle was not "three hours and a half," but only two. By midnight the men knew they could not carry the breach. Says Napier: "Gathering in dark groups, and leaning on their muskets, they looked up with sullen desperation at the Trinidad, while the enemy stepping on the ramparts and aiming their shots by the light of the fire-balls which they threw over, asked as their victims fell, 'Why they did not come into Badajos?'" Wellington at last sent orders for them to fall back, and the bugles were calling the "retire." But the men for a time refused to obey;

they struck the buglers who were sounding that hated call.

The attack on the castle might have seemed, in advance, much more hopeless than those on the breaches. It rose like a cliff in the darkness, built on a rock 100 feet high, with walls that varied from eighteen feet to twenty-four feet in height. The men of the 3rd were standing in the darkness waiting for the signal to advance, when a fire-ball flung from the castle cast its light on the dark lines of the waiting regiments, and Kempt, who was in command —for Picton had not yet come up—instantly took forward his men.

The Rivillas, knee-deep, was forded, the rough slope of rock climbed, the foot of the walls reached. Phillipon reckoned the castle impregnable, but he had taken no risks. The walls were thronged with defenders, each man having beside him a little pile of loaded muskets, with hand grenades and small shells. Under a deadly fire from the guns which commanded the face of the wall the ladders were set up, and instantly crowded with climbing men. But the cross-fire from the bastions on either flank, the volleys from the parapets above, destroyed the ladders as fast as they were raised, or emptied them as often as they were filled. For an hour the men of the 3rd strove, in vain, to climb those black walls spitting fire at them from above and from every side. Ridge, of the 4th, at last got two ladders placed at a new spot

in the wall where the parapets were a little lower. He led the way up one; Canch, an officer of the 5th, mounted the other. They forced their way up and through, the eager stormers thronging after them, and the parapets were won.

The British could hardly believe in their own success. Picton himself said afterwards, "I could hardly make myself believe that we had taken the castle."

The next thing was to break into the town and take the defence at the breaches in the rear; but the great iron gate that led to the town had been locked and barred. The men of the 88th made a rush at it, trying furiously to burst it open with their shoulders, while the French on the other side shot fast on them through the grating. At last an officer seized a French gun that was near, wheeled it round, and blew the gate open, and so access to the town was won. At the opposite extremity Leith Hay had escaladed San Vincente, and was by this marching at speed across the town. The hush of fear lay on all the streets; every door was shut, but all the houses were alight. A line of mules carrying ammunition to the great breach crossed the path of Leith Hay's men, and was captured. Then, gaining the rear of the breach, they commenced firing.

All this time Wellington, with his staff, had been watching the scene at the great breach. Some one held a torch near, and its uncertain light shone on

Wellington's features. Messenger after messenger came up bringing news from the various attacks, and every message was bad.

"At this moment," says one who stood in the group, "I cast my eyes on the countenance of Wellington, lit up by the glare of the torch held by Lord March. I never shall forget it to the last moment of my existence, and I could even now sketch it. The jaw had fallen, the face was of unusual length, while the torchlight gave his countenance a lurid aspect; but still the expression of the face was firm."

Wellington now sent word to the men in front of the great breach, who had by this time fallen back, that they must advance again. Sir Harry Smith tells how Fitzroy Somerset—afterwards Lord Raglan—brought the order to renew the attack. "Why," I said, "we have had enough. We are all knocked to pieces." "I dare say," he replied, "but you must try again." I smiled, and said, "If we could not succeed with two whole fresh divisions we are likely to make a poor show now. But we will try again with all our might," and he adds, "Our fellows would have gone at it again when collected and put into shape." But at that moment there came the scream of a British bugle from within the breach itself. Picton's men from the castle, and Leith Hay's men from San Vincente, were in the town; the defence of the trenches was abandoned, Badajos was won.

In that wild night struggle 3500 officers and men

were killed or wounded, 60 officers and more than 700 men being slain on the spot. The whole siege cost Wellington 5000 men. It is said that when, in the dawn of the next day, Wellington realised what the losses of the night had been, even his hard nature, for a moment, was swept by a passion of grief, and he gave way to a burst of sorrow, that rare emotion of a strong and self-contained man.

The scenes which followed the capture of the city blackened the whole heroism of the story, and cast a shadow on Wellington's own reputation. For more than forty-eight hours Badajos was given up to sack and plunder, and the British regiments, who had fought their way into it with a daring so noble, temporarily dissolved into a vast company of brigands. It is true that the whole shame of that story does not lie on the British army. Grattan describes how "hordes of vagabonds, Spaniards as well as Portuguese, women as well as men, found their way into the captured town," so that he reckons "some 20,000 people," most of them armed, the majority of them drunk, and all without any restraint, were let loose upon the unhappy inhabitants of Badajos. Not till the second day did Wellington march a brigade into the city, set up a gallows, and enforce order.

One bright gleam of romance shines in the dark sky of that story. On the morning after the siege Kincaid was standing near the door of his tent, when, as he tells the tale, two Spanish ladies came

hurriedly up. They had fled from the plundering horde in Badajos, blood was still trickling down their necks, from their ears, whence jewels had been wrenched. The elder begged for herself and her sister the protection of British officers. Her sister was a girl of fourteen; the enthusiastic Kincaid calls her "an angel, a being more transcendently lovely than I had ever before seen."[1] Protection was of course given to these ladies, and Sir Harry Smith instantly fell violently in love with the younger, and married her after a courtship to be measured in hours. The marriage was one of the happiest on record. It has left a permanent mark, indeed, on British history; for Sir Harry Smith was afterwards in command at the Cape, and "Ladysmith" takes its name from that Spanish girl, with bleeding ears, whom Sir Harry Smith made his wife. That story is a strange pearl to be thrown up from that black sea of sack and slaughter which followed the capture of Badajos.

[1] "Random Shots by a Rifleman," p. 292.

CHAPTER XVI

SALAMANCA

"The night before the battle of Borodino, Napoleon received in his tent the officer who brought him the news of the battle of Salamanca. 'We will repair in the action of to-morrow,' was his reply, 'the faults committed at the Arapiles.'"—MITCHELL.

AFTER its capture, Wellington put Badajos, as he had put Ciudad, into the hands of the Spaniards, for he had won these cities for Spain, not for himself; then he marched north, and resumed his position at Beira. Marmont, who had crossed the Portuguese frontier in a faint-hearted attempt to raise the siege by threatening the road to Lisbon, himself fell back to Salamanca; Soult returned to Andalusia, where Hill, with his headquarters at Merida, kept watch over him, and for nearly two months—until the middle of June—no serious operations were undertaken on either side.

But though his army rested, Wellington found no rest. He had a great task before him. There were still 300,000 French soldiers in Spain; in Andalusia Soult, who was a great administrator as well as a great captain, had enlisted 40,000 Spanish soldiers —of more or less uncertain quality—under the

standard of King Joseph. Spaniards, in a word, were beginning to fight for the tricolour. Marmont had a force of 52,000 at Salamanca; Caffarelli lay beyond Burgos with 32,000; Joseph had 22,000 in Madrid; Soult had 56,000 in Andalusia; Suchet held Calabria with 60,000.

Here was a great curve of threatening forces, under daring and capable leaders, ready to close in upon the British from every side. Wellington's whole force consisted of 56,000 troops, British and Portuguese; it was distributed along a front of 400 miles. Discipline was slack, supplies were scanty and difficult, sickness was rife; enormous numbers were in the rough, improvised, ill-equipped hospitals of that period. Many of his regiments had the taint of the Walcheren fever in their blood. In a despatch dated October 2, 1811, Wellington says: "I yesterday saw the 4th Dragoon Guards. Of 470 men they could produce only 230 mounted, and these looked more like men coming out of the hospital than troops just arrived from England. . . . All the newly arrived cavalry are nearly in the same state."

The chances against him, in a word, seemed to be overwhelming; but Wellington, with his cool and sure judgment, read all the elements of weakness in the position of his enemy. Joseph had at last been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the French armies in Spain; but his authority was a sham. Each general, in turn, disputed his orders, or evaded

them, or contrived to forget them. There were as many plans of operations as there were generals, and each general planned not for Spain, or for Napoleon, but for himself. The British had the supreme advantage of being under the control of a single clear head, a single masterful but loyal will.

Wellington was brooding over great plans, but he had great perplexities—not the least of his perplexities being the constant want of money. His complaints on this point are bitter. He tells again and again, in accents of despair, how the troops were left without pay, and the army was without credit. In July, 1812, he complains that his troops were four, his staff six, and his muleteers nearly twelve months in arrears of pay. He was in debt, he protested, "everywhere, and for everything." It must be remembered that, in a sense, the whole struggle in the Peninsula turned on the question of whether the British method of obtaining supplies, or that of the French, would, in the long run, work most successfully. The French depended upon extracting supplies by force, and without paying for them, from the country through which they passed. Wellington paid for his supplies, and depended upon established magazines at his base. It was this which made the question of a supply of money so vital to him; and it explains the energetic complaints of the inadequate supply of cash which run through all his despatches. He lived perpetually on the edge of bankruptcy—

and not seldom went over the edge. On July 15—only five days before Salamanca was fought—he writes: "I have never been in such distress as at present. . . . If we do not find means of paying our bills for butcher's meat, there will be an end to the war at once." Before starting on the campaign which reached its climax at Salamanca, he wrote to Lord Liverpool: "I cannot reflect without shuddering upon the consequences which may result from our wanting money in the interior of Spain." The failure at Burgos is the best comment on these words.

As a preparation for his new campaign, Wellington made a sudden and deadly thrust at the vital link in the communications betwixt Marmont and Soult—the bridge at Almarez. It had been strongly fortified, and was held by a powerful garrison. Wellington gave Hill the task of seizing and destroying the all-important bridge, and he showed the spirit of a wise commander in the matter. Having chosen the man for the enterprise, he left him free to choose his own time and method. It was a perilous task. Hill had to thrust himself secretly and far in the enemy's country, to storm the bridge and its forts without artillery, and march back with such adroitness and speed as to escape the stroke of overwhelming forces which lay on every side of him. And he did it all with a cool and reasoned audacity, and a completeness of success, which made it one of

the most brilliant strokes of individual soldiership in the whole war. Having, in this way, destroyed the communications betwixt Marmont and Soult, Wellington made communications betwixt Ciudad and Badajos easy and safe by restoring, with great skill, the broken bridge at Alcantara.

He was now free for the great campaign he meditated. His plan was to strike at Marmont in his front, making meanwhile far-stretching arrangements to keep the other French generals occupied. The defeat of Marmont would leave Madrid open, compel Soult to abandon Andalusia, and shake Suchet's hold of Catalonia.

On June 13 Wellington set his columns in motion across the Agueda; in four days he was within six miles of Salamanca. All the bridges on the Tormes had been destroyed, but he crossed by various fords and entered the town, Marmont falling back towards the Douro.

Salamanca welcomed the British with tumultuous joy. They came as deliverers. The French yoke had been cruel; and the shouting crowds in the streets were in a passion of gratitude. But Spanish crowds are liable to sudden and violent changes of mood. When the British passed through Salamanca five months afterwards they were scowled at with almost murderous hate. And yet, in the interval, they had overthrown Marmont in a great battle, and had turned the French out of Madrid.

Wellington's first business was to capture the forts Marmont had built in order to hold the town. He had destroyed thirteen convents and thirty-two colleges in the construction of these forts, and they were of formidable strength. It would take fifteen days, Marmont reckoned, to carry them; and, unlike most French reckonings where Wellington was concerned, this proved accurate, owing to the fact that the artillery Wellington had brought was too light for breaching purposes, and that he had to send back to Almeida for a battering train. Meanwhile Marmont, waiting for reinforcements, stood beyond the Tormes, watching, and eager to strike. He was a dangerous opponent, high in daring, swift of genius, a trained soldier, with a special gift for tactics. He was in the prime of life, of a certain fierce energy, and with a more than French appetite for fame. The one thing he lacked was that most necessary quality of a great commander—patience. Reinforcements were coming up; Bonnet was already on the march to join him; Caffarelli was prepared to move. But Joseph was urging him to strike at Wellington; his own temperament made caution difficult; and he began that tangle of swift marches and countermarches which, to-day, are scarcely intelligible without a personal knowledge of the country, and which ended in hopeless disaster.

For a time Marmont seemed to out-manœuvre his antagonist. The country, rugged with unrelated

hills, mottled with patches of forest, suited his tactics; and Marmont was familiar with every curve and wrinkle of it. His aim was to strike at Wellington's communications with Ciudad and compel him to retreat. He watched eagerly, too, in the hope that he might catch his formidable rival in some perilous situation where he could be attacked with success. Wellington's care was to guard his communications with the south, keep his hold on Salamanca, and only fight where he had the advantage of position. Marmont's swift and perpetually changing thrusts at his opponent sometimes laid him open to a deadly counter-stroke. But Wellington would take no risks. He would not strike until his stroke was sure. The two great armies, in a word, were like hawks, balancing, with threatening talons, in mid-air, and watching for a chance to swoop on the other. Sometimes, for a moment, as they swept past each other, they clashed, and the feathers flew.

One such a momentary clash betwixt the outer fringes of the two armies brought great personal peril to Wellington himself. On the 18th, Cotton, with the Fourth and Light Divisions, and Anson's cavalry, was in a bad position behind the Trabancos, with the whole French army in his front. Wellington, with Beresford, had come up in the early morning, and was trying to see the enemy through the fog, when some French horsemen

suddenly galloped upon them. Kincaid was on picket duty at that point, and he tells how

"Lord Wellington, with his staff, and a cloud of French and English dragoons and horse artillery intermixed, came over the hill at full cry, and all hammering at each other's heads in one confused mass. He had gone there to reconnoitre, covered by two guns and two squadrons of cavalry, who by some accident were surprised and charged by a superior body of the enemy, and sent tumbling in upon us. . . . We were obliged to remain passive spectators of such an extraordinary scene going on within a few yards of us, as we could not fire without an equal chance of shooting some of our own side. Lord Wellington and his staff, with the two guns, took shelter for a moment behind us, while the cavalry went sweeping along our front, where, I suppose, they picked up some reinforcement, for they returned almost instantly in the same confused mass; but the French were now the fliers.

"It was highly interesting all this time in observing the distinguished characters which this unlooked-for turn-up had assembled around us. Marshal Beresford and the greater part of the staff remained with their swords drawn, and the Duke himself did not look more than half-pleased, while he silently despatched some of them with orders. General Alten and his huge German orderly dragoon, with their swords drawn, cursed the whole time to a very large amount; but, as it was in German, I had not the full benefit of it. He had an opposition swearer in Captain Jenkinson of the artillery, who commanded the two guns, and whose oaths were chiefly aimed at himself for his folly, as far as I could understand, in putting so much confidence in his covering party."[1]

Once, during a pause in these evolutions, the two armies held a position facing each other near Reuda. It was a wine district; the caves, which make the neighbourhood famous, were little better than vast

[1] "Adventures in the Rifle Brigade," p. 71.

wine cellars, and the soldiers of both armies, in huge numbers, got drunk in them in company. "Many men on both sides," says Napier, "perished in these caves. . . . The banks of the Douro seemed, for a time, to belong to one army, so difficult is it to make brave men hate each other." Especially, it may be added, when they can get drunk together, and without cost.

Marmont justified his policy of swift and baffling tactics to Joseph in almost amusing terms. "This class of operations," he wrote, "is the only one to adopt with the English, who display peculiar talent in taking up positions, which it is necessary to thwart as much as possible by preventing them establishing themselves before giving them battle."

This gigantic fencing match betwixt two masters in the art of war resulted in some very picturesque incidents. Twice—once on July 18, in a race for the Guarena, and a second time on the 20th, in a similar race to reach the ford of Huerta, on the Tormes—the two armies pressed on at speed within a half cannon-shot of each other; the officers in either army exchanging salutes, the cavalry watching for an opportunity of charging, the artillery for some advantageous point at which they could wheel round and open fire.

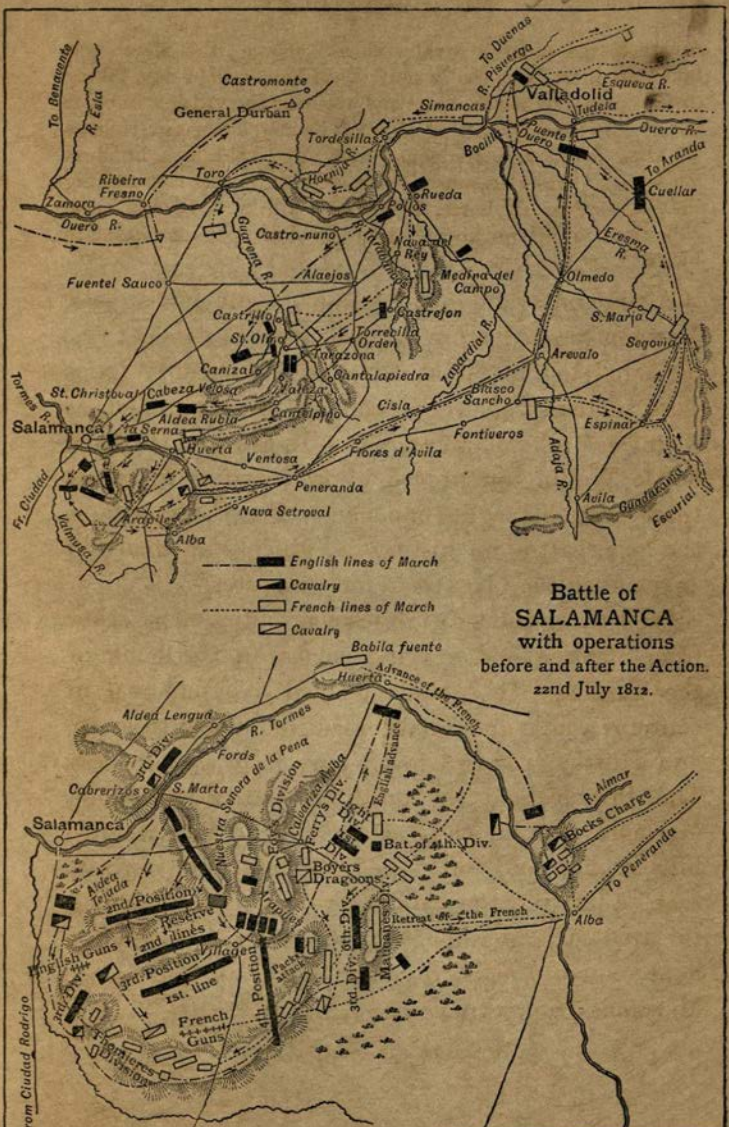
"The country all round," says Major Simmons, "was one vast plain, and the soldiers were moving across it in column of companies at quarter distance, ready by regiments to form

square if the enemy's cavalry should charge; the march was taken up literally as coolly as if it had been a field day, taking distant points to march upon, and avoiding the villages in order not to lose time by passing through them. Upon our right as we then faced, and frequently not more than five hundred yards distant from us, was a dense mass of Frenchmen moving in the same order, horse, foot, and artillery. It was quite ridiculous to see two hostile armies so close without coming to blows."[1]

Again and again, in this game of swift movements, Marmont proved more agile than his opponent; but he dared too much at last, and his dainty tactics were suddenly shattered, and his army wrecked, as with the stroke of an aerolite. In the actual test of battle Wellington proved himself swifter to thrust than even his agile opponent. For Salamanca is the one battle in history in which "an army of 40,000 men were beaten in forty minutes."

On July 22 the two armies confronted each other from opposed and curving ridges on the bank of the Tormes. These hills defined a basin, oval in contour, a mile and a half broad from north to south, and a little over two miles long from east to west. The British held the northern and western hills, Marmont was on the eastern ridge. Two isolated hills, rugged and lofty, the Arapiles, stood opposite each other, like the gate-posts of a natural amphitheatre—fit arena for a great battle. Wellington held one of these great hills with his left wing; Marmont's right wing extended to the other.

[1] "British Riflemen," p. 229.



Napier's "Peninsular War."

Walker & Boutall sc.

Marmont was eager to fight. The contest of tactics stretching through ten days had given him confidence. Bonnet had come up with 6000 infantry. He believed himself to be the better general, and he had the advantage of his enemy in numbers. Wellington, on the other hand, with his sober caution, had made up his mind to fall back upon Ciudad. Joseph was moving from the centre to join Marmont; Caffarelli's cavalry brigades were on the march. It was certain that the French, in a few days, would be on his front in overwhelming strength. He could not afford to fight a costly—still less a losing—battle, and he sent a letter to Castanos announcing his determination to fall back across the Portuguese frontier. That letter, by a stroke of ill-luck for the French, fell into Marmont's hands, and determined him to fight. In the light of after events the letter was looked on as a clever trap on Wellington's part.

At mid-day on July 22 Marmont, watching the British position, saw clouds of dust rising against the clear sky in their rear. Wellington was sending his baggage along the road to Ciudad, and that spectacle fired Marmont's temper. It suggested a retreat and an escape, and he instantly set Maucune's divisions, on his extreme left, moving along the curving southern ridge, intending to strike at the Ciudad road and break through Wellington's communications. But in his eagerness to get past his

opponent's flank and strike at his rear, Marmont forgot that he was leaving a gap in his own front.

It was by this time three o'clock. Wellington watched with stern content the movement of the French divisions along the southern ridge, while the fatal gap widened, until the left wing of the French army was completely parted from the centre. "Marmont is lost," he said, and he struck instantly and with all his force. He rode at speed to his right wing where Pakenham was in command of the 3rd Division. "Do you see, Ned," he asked, "those fellows on the hill? Throw your division into columns at them directly, and drive them to the devil."

Marmont, from the French Arapiles watching Maucune's divisions on the march, suddenly saw the red columns of the British striking across what may be called the floor of the amphitheatre. The movement resembled the thrust of a bloody sword at his front. He was quick to see his danger, and strove desperately to meet Wellington's stroke. Officer after officer went riding at speed to stop Maucune's fatal movement, and others to bring up troops from the second line to fill the gap in the centre. But another red column was now thrust across the plain at the unhappy Maucune's flank. His divisions, almost at the same moment, were barred in front, smitten on their flank, and cut off from the main body of the army in their rear. Marmont, by this

time, was riding furiously, like a gallant soldier, to the point of danger. He was struck by an exploding shell and dangerously wounded, and the French army, with such a tempest of war breaking on it, was left for the moment without a commander.

Maucune's leading division, under Thomieres, came round the flank of an isolated hill, expecting to see the British in retreat on the Ciudad road, and found across its front Pakenham's regiments, moving swiftly to the charge. At the same moment some guns on the hill itself opened a shattering fire on its flank. The French faced a sudden and overwhelming disaster gallantly, but Pakenham's stroke was not to be denied. Clausel's division had, by this time, reinforced Maucune, but the 5th Division came into the firing line, and its dreadful volleys, added to those of Pakenham, rent the disordered battalions of the French well-nigh into fragments. Then through the space betwixt the two divisions there suddenly came a cloud of whirling dust, within which was the trampling sound of innumerable hoofs. It opened as it passed beyond the British front, and Anson's light cavalry, and Le Marchant's heavy brigade, riding at speed, broke upon the French. Some 1200 French infantry were almost at a breath trampled out of existence. The dragoons, big men on big horses, still rode onwards, smiting with their glittering swords, and battalion after battalion of the unhappy French in succession were simply destroyed.

Le Marchant fell, with many of his horsemen, for the French, though broken, fought gallantly; but in all the overwhelming impact of their charge the British horse rode furiously on, broke through yet another French column, and captured a battery of five guns. In that one charge 2000 prisoners were taken, and Maucune's three divisions practically ceased to exist as a military force.

Pakenham's charge, though so swift, so instantly and brilliantly successful, yet involved some hard fighting, for the French were veterans, and their officers were gallant men. Grattan, of the 88th, was in the fight, and gives a very realistic account of it—

"Pakenham told Wallace to form line from open column without halting, and thus the different companies came into line without the slow manœuvre of a deployment. . . . The manœuvre was a bold, as well as a novel one, and the appearance of the brigade imposing, because it so happened that all the British officers were in front of their men—a rare occurrence. . . . The soldiers, with their firelocks on the rest, followed close upon the heels of their officers, like troops accustomed to conquer. They speedily got footing upon the brow of the hill, but before they had time to take breath the entire French division, with drums beating and uttering loud shouts, ran forward to meet them, and belching forth a torrent of bullets from five thousand muskets, brought down almost the entire of Wallace's front rank, and more than half of his officers. The brigade staggered back from the force of the shock, but before the smoke had altogether cleared away, Wallace, looking full in the faces of his soldiers, pointed to the French column, and leading the shattered brigade up the hill, without a moment's hesitation brought them face to face. . . . Thomieres' division wavered; they opened a heavy discharge of musketry, but it was unlike the former. It was irregular and ill-directed, the men acted without concert or method, and

many fired in the air. At length their fire ceased altogether, and the three regiments, for the first time, cheered. The effect was electric; Thomieres' troops were seized with a panic, and as Wallace closed upon him, his men could distinctly remark their bearing. Their mustachioed faces, one and all, presented the same ghastly hue; and as they stood to receive the shock they were about to be assailed with, they reeled to and fro like men intoxicated. . . . Pakenham, seeing that the proper moment had arrived, called out 'Charge.' The three regiments ran onward, and the mighty phalanx, which but a moment before was so formidable, loosened and fell in pieces before fifteen hundred invincible British soldiers fighting in a line of only two deep." [1]

A French army, however, has great rallying power. Pack, with his division of the Portuguese, had been launched at the French Arapiles at the moment Pakenham advanced. The Portuguese reached the crest of the great hill, but were flung down its slope in ruin by a vehement bayonet charge. Clausel was now in command of the French. He was a cool and brave soldier, and with stubborn patience was forming a new front; but Wellington, who, with the instinct of a great soldier, was always at the point of danger, brought up the 6th Division to the fight. The French were driven back afresh, Clausel himself was wounded. Foy's division had abandoned the Arapiles after it had wrecked the Portuguese attack, and, with great skill, covered the road to the river fords by which the broken army must escape. One of his divisions joined the survivors of Maucune's

[1] Grattan, p. 240.

command, and stubbornly clung to the steep ridge covering the road which ran through the forest to Alba de Tormes, along which many regiments were now falling back in disorder. Wellington launched the Light Division against Foy, supporting it with the 1st Division and some squadrons of dragoons; but Foy had something of Ney's genius in retreat, and though hard pressed, yet evaded any fatal stroke.

Maucune's position on the ridge was assailed by the 6th Division, and the fight was the most picturesque feature of the whole battle. It was by this time dark, and, watched from a distance, the progress of the attack on the hill was registered by the irregular front of fire, now curving upward, now drawn back, answered by the darting flames of musketry volleys from the French on the crest. "Clinton's men," says Grattan, "looked as if they were attacking a burning mountain." He adds that the French, "besmeared with blood, dust, and clay, and some carrying only broken weapons, fought with a fury not to be surpassed."

"On the side of the British," to quote Napier, "a sheet of flame was seen, sometimes advancing with an even front, sometimes pricking forth in spear heads, now falling back in waving lines and anon darting upwards in one vast pyramid, the apex of which often approached yet never gained the actual summit of the mountain—the French musketry in opposition, rapid as lightning, sparkled along the brow of the height with unvarying fulness, and with what destructive effects the dark gaps and changing shapes of the adverse fire showed too plainly."

Pakenham, however, turned the left of the hill; Foy's regiments had already disappeared along the road to Alba de Tormes, and Maucune slipped adroitly from the ridge and followed. He had played the part of a good soldier.

Alba de Tormes, commanding a bridge across the Tormes, had been placed by Wellington in charge of a Spanish garrison, and he followed the French, expecting to find them held up at the bridge; but the bridge was empty. The Spaniards had abandoned Alba de Tormes against Wellington's orders, and without informing him of what they had done. The French were across, and their retreat was pushed with such speed that on the day after the fight Clausel was forty miles from Salamanca.

In the fight the British lost in killed and wounded 5200, but the French loss amounted to 14,000, of whom 7000 were prisoners. But as the result of Spanish carelessness or stupidity, which left the gap at Alba de Tormes open, "The French," says Wellington, "were able to bring off about 9000 or 10,000 men which we must have captured if the garrison had been left at Alba." It cannot be said, however, that Wellington himself showed great energy in the pursuit of Marmont's shattered army. When night fell and the French were in broken flight through the forest, Wellington's left wing, which had taken no part in the fight, was still fresh, and could have reached the Alamar before daylight, and

swept up the wrecks of Clausel's broken columns. But Wellington, sometimes at least, failed to show that sure sign of a great captain, the faculty of pursuing a beaten enemy with fierce, sustained, and pitiless energy, till the uttermost fruits of victory were reaped.

Salamanca, in its general results, resembled the stab of a lancet on one of the great nerve-centres of the human body. It set every limb quivering. Joseph at Madrid, Soult outside Cadiz, Caffarelli in the North, Suchet in Catalonia, all felt the shock. The news of the battle reached Napoleon on September 2, a week before Borodino was fought, and filled him with astonished rage. He described the unfortunate marshal's despatch as "rubbish," he accused him of "the crime insubordination, which is the cause of all our misfortunes in this affair." Napoleon had written too many bulletins himself to have much respect for those his marshals composed, but when he read Wellington's despatch, describing the battle, he recognised the accents of truth. "I am sure," he said, "this is a true account," and truth was kinder to Marmont than his own explanations. "After all," was Napoleon's summary, "he was not so much to blame; he had crossed weapons with a better commander than himself."

Wellington himself, it is interesting to know, considered Salamanca as one of the three finest of all his battles: Napier describes it as "his finest illus-

tration of the art of war." For Wellington the battle had the merit of "having fewer blunders in its conduct than any other battle he knew." He had the instinct of an artist, or of a good workman; he abhorred blunders; he prized neatness and thoroughness of workmanship. But all the characteristics of a great captain are stamped on the battle—the swift vision that saw his enemy's blunder, the instant resolve to attack, the lightning-like thrust, the casting of his whole strength into his attack. For Wellington, almost at the moment he launched Pakenham at Maucune on the extreme of Marmont's left wing, struck, too, at his centre, and at the extremity of his right wing.

Madrid has to be added to the trophies of Salamanca. King Joseph abandoned the city on the news of Wellington's approach, his departure resembling more the migration of a colony than the march of an army. A vast disordered procession of 20,000 non-combatants, and nearly 3000 carriages, principally laden with plunder, went with him. Wellington might have easily leaped upon that disordered mass. His cavalry could have driven them into the Tagus, and the capture of the brother of Napoleon would have affected the public imagination as much as the defeat of Marmont. But here, again, Wellington allowed a chance to slip.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RETREAT FROM BURGOS

"To great minds, great misfortunes are seldom unmixed evils. Out of the nettle calamity they pluck the flower wisdom."

—HAMLEY.

JOSEPH left Madrid on the night of August 11, and on the 12th Wellington rode into it. He was welcomed with more passionate rejoicings than even at Salamanca, and through the tumult of gladness which greeted him in Madrid there ran a deeper note. He brought to a proud, oppressed capital a great deliverance. The airs of freedom seemed once more to blow over the roofs of Madrid as he rode through its streets. The very women thronged to kiss his stirrups or touch his clothes. Joseph, it may be added, had left behind him a very valuable prize, in the Retiro, the chief French arsenal in Spain, containing vast stores, 180 guns, 10,000 stands of arms, and even the eagles of two French regiments. Its garrison of 2000 good troops was another prize, for they were compelled to surrender without firing a shot.

Yet Wellington's position, for all its aspect of

success and pride, had many perplexities. He had captured two great fortresses, won a signal victory, driven Joseph in flight to Toledo, and held the Spanish capital. But it was the paradox of Spanish affairs that his very success created new perils. It set the French columns marching from every province in Spain towards Madrid. It is true that each departing column meant deliverance for some area, big or little, of Spanish territory; but Wellington was accomplishing the deliverance of Spanish provinces only at the price of multiplying the foes crowding to attack himself.

Soult, with bitter reluctance and against his own wiser judgment, abandoned Andalusia, flinging away the organised work of years, and marched to join King Joseph. It is curious to note that Wellington, at this point, was repeating Moore's great feat. By a single march on Salamanca, in 1808, Moore had saved Andalusia from the French; and Wellington, in 1812, by a single battle fought within sight of Salamanca, had set every Frenchmen in Andalusia marching out of it.

The forces now converging on Wellington in Madrid were on a very menacing scale. When the armies of Soult, of Clausel, of Suchet, and of Joseph fell into battle-line together, they would be more that double the British in strength. Wellington had depended, as always, on a certain amount of service from Spanish armies, and still more from

Spanish guerillas. He counted, too, on the rivalries of French marshals amongst themselves, and on the certainty that, in order to escape famine, any concentration of French armies must be brief. But he had counted also on another factor. A British army of 15,000 men was to be landed under Lord William Bentinck at Alcantara, on the eastern coast of Spain, and this would at least make it impossible for Suchet to march to the help of Joseph. But Bentinck was allowed to carry his troops, on an irrelevant adventure, to Italy, and when Wellington learned this he declared it was fatal to his whole campaign. It is true that a small force did land in Spain, under Maitland, but it was inadequate in strength, was under weak generalship, and had no influence on affairs round Madrid.

In addition to the chronic lack of money which, by the cruelty of fate, became acute at the very moment he seemed at the pinnacle of success in Madrid, Wellington was troubled by a curious loss of morale in his army at this period. His battalions were scattered over a wide area, along the great road betwixt Madrid and Ciudad; new troops were coming up; some of his best generals had gone on leave, and there was relaxed discipline everywhere. The army, as a matter of fact, was paying the price of the crimes of those wild days when Ciudad and Badajos were sacked. These had left a taint in its very blood. There was awakened in it a law-

less temper, a lust for plunder, fatal to good soldiership.

A French army quickly recovers from defeat, and by the middle of August Clausel, with 20,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry, and fifty guns was moving. His design was to threaten Wellington's flank, when the combined forces of Soult and Joseph should drive the British from Madrid. Foy, too, was vexing Wellington's communications, and Wellington watched all these movements with vigilant eyes, till the moment came for striking.

On September 1 he quitted Madrid—his army, diminished by sickness, amounting to only 22,000 men—and moved on Clausel, driving him from Valladolid. The French general fell back, always evading Wellington's strokes, till he reached Burgos. It was held by a garrison of 1800 men, under Dubreton, a soldier worthy to be classed with Phillipon for skill in defence. It commanded the French line of communication with the Pyrenees, and its siege represents one of Wellington's failures. The castle stood on a long cone-shaped hill, with three concentric lines of defence, no one of which seemed of formidable strength; yet Wellington spent thirty-three days, and expended five assaults, in trying to carry that insignificant fortress; and, having lost more than 2000 men, abandoned the siege, and with it his position in Spain. It is perhaps the most surprising anti-climax in his whole career,

that, having captured powerful fortresses like Ciudad and Badajos, with such stern energy, and in a space of time so brief, he suffered defeat at Burgos.

There are many explanations of the failure. Wellington's artillery was absurdly inadequate to the task of breaching even the slender defences of Burgos, and he adopted the plan of breaking through each circle of defence in turn by a succession of mines. This process was tedious, and it proved fatally inadequate. The assaults failed because there was more energy in the defence than in the attack. Wellington's despatches during the siege make distressing reading. He writes himself to Marshal Beresford, on October 5: "I do not know what to say of this d——d place. . . . Our final success is still doubtful. Luckily the French give me more time than I had a right to expect."[1]

The plain truth was the army had deteriorated. Wellington no longer had stormers like the men of the "Fighting Third" or of the Light Division; they had died winning Ciudad and Badajos. Many years afterwards he told Croker:

"The fault of which I was guilty in the expedition to Burgos was, not that I undertook the operation with inadequate means, but that I took there the most inexperienced instead of the best troops. I left at Madrid the 3rd, 4th, and Light Divisions, who had been with myself always before. In fact, the troops ought to have carried the exterior line by escalade on the first trial on September 22, and if they had, we had means sufficient to take the place."

[1] "Despatches," vol. ix. p. 466.

But ineffective fighting is the penalty of bad discipline, and Wellington, with the eye of a good captain, saw the change a decay of discipline, and loss of "tone," had made in his troops. "Something or other," he writes, "makes a terrible alteration in the troops for the worse. They have lately in several instances behaved very ill, whether owing to the nature of the service, or to their want of pay, I cannot tell, but they are not at all in the style they were."

Wellington told Ellesmere that, at the siege of Burgos, he had only two or three howitzers, and one gun called "Nelson" by the soldiers, because one trunnion had been shot away. The failure of the siege "was all my own fault," Wellington went on to say. "The castle was not unlike a hill-fort in India, and I had got into a good many of them. So I thought I could get into this, and I very nearly did it. But it was defended by a very careful fellow. As fast as I could establish myself he attacked and drove me out."

Early in October Soult joined the army of the centre under Jourdan. Masséna had been offered the command of the French forces in the north, and the temptation of crossing weapons with Wellington afresh, and under more favourable conditions—of fighting him when the weapon of famine was broken in his hand, and only the sword remained—and so avenging the failure of 1811, was

great. But he was too old and broken in health for active service in the field, and Souham took his place.

On October 21 Wellington raised the siege of Burgos; he had decided to fall back to his base at Ciudad. But, to reach the road leading to the south, he must cross the Arlanzon, and the bridge was commanded by the guns of the castle. Dubreton was on the alert, and to cross seemed impossible. It was night when Wellington moved; no wind stirred, so that the faintest sound seemed to fill the darkness with echoes. Dubreton flung blue lights at brief intervals over his ramparts. To attempt to cross under such conditions needed high daring. But Wellington muffled the wheels of his artillery with straw, sternly commanded silence in the ranks, and his battalions—many of the men barefooted—crossed the bridge quickly, but in absolute silence. The weird flame of Dubreton's blue lights fell on the dark column as it stole noiseless as a shadow, or as an army of ghosts, across the bridge, but somehow the movement escaped detection until some Spanish cavalry, finding the strain on their nerves too great, broke into a gallop. Then the clatter of hoofs on the bridge was instantly answered by the roar of guns on the ramparts. It is difficult, however, to shoot in the dark, and the whole force crossed with little loss.

From this date begins the famous and tragical

retreat to Ciudad, a tale written in characters of suffering, and which almost deserves to be classed with Moore's retreat to Corunna. It was a retreat from widely separate points, for while Wellington was falling back to the south, Hill, coming from Madrid, had to march almost due west, joining his chief at Salamanca. It needed a nice adjustment of time and speed to effect a junction betwixt two armies moving across rough country, over distances so great, and each pressed by stronger forces in pursuit. If both the retreating forces had not been under the direction of a cool head and a resolute will no junction could have been effected. Hill started from Madrid on October 31, and joined Wellington in front of Salamanca on November 7. No cheering crowds welcomed the allies as they passed through that city. They were in retreat; their presence represented failure; the avenging French were coming up, and many passions—disappointment, fear, and even a touch of contempt—burned with a sort of sullen fire in the faces of the crowd which filled the streets of Salamanca as Wellington's troops passed through.

There yet remained 100 miles to cross, in hunger, cold, weariness, and disgust, with a French army—never so dangerous as in pursuit—hanging on their rear, before the retreating army could reach Ciudad.

The whole distance from Burgos to Ciudad is

less than 300 miles; the retreat occupied four weeks; so that it cannot be said that either the retreat or the pursuit was marked by great speed. At no point, in fact, during its whole course, were the British severely pressed by the French, and Wellington, though his army had almost lost its marching power, was able to outmarch, or outmanœuvre, his pursuers, and evade a battle. Grattan, indeed, suggests that Soult, who was now in command of the pursuit, was not anxious for a fight. "No marshal in the French army," he says, "knew the good and the bad qualities of the soldiers he now followed better than Soult, few so well. He had pursued them to Corunna, fought them at Albuera, and been chased out of Oporto by them." He knew that these ragged, barefooted, hunger-bitten regiments, if offered the chance of battle, would harden as at a breath into a fighting force of terrible efficiency. To keep that slow, sullen retreat moving served the French cause better than even a victory; so he hung upon Wellington's rear, but never frankly closed in battle upon him.

The retreat was marked, of course, by some combats, notably at Carrion, where Wellington halted for two nights and a day to enable the Guards, coming up from Corunna, to join him, and he roughly challenged Souham in his attempt to cross the river in his front. At Torquamada the great wine vaults of the place afforded the wearied

soldiers an opportunity for getting drunk in whole battalions, and it is said that 12,000 men were simultaneously and hopelessly intoxicated. Wellington stood at guard, again, on the very ground where nearly four months before he had overthrown Marmont, this time occupying both the Arapiles. The French had 90,000 men—12,000 being cavalry—with 120 guns. Wellington had a mixed force of 62,000, no less that 12,000 being Spanish troops, worthless in battle.

The French commanders held eager consultation as to whether they should attack. Jourdan, though he had less of the fire of youth in his blood than any of his fellow-generals, was for marching by the shortest road on Wellington's front. Soult, who knew that a British army in the bitter temper bred of a defeat had dangerous fighting qualities, preferred ingenious manœuvring to rough battle. He would follow Marmont's tactics, and turn Wellington's right wing, and so break his communications; but he would avoid Marmont's fault, and keep beyond the reach of Wellington's dreadful counter-stroke.

The French columns accordingly were set marching in a wide curve round the British position, and Wellington watched the movement grimly as he had, on that other historical day, watched Marmont's left wing dislocating itself. But no chance was offered of repeating the fatal thrust which had given the British victory on July 22. If Wellington could

not shatter his enemy by a direct attack, however, he showed that he could cheat him by adroit manœuvring. Low clouds hung over the crest of the ridges, a light fog pricked with rain was drifting across the plain, and Wellington threw his army into three columns, placed his cavalry and guns as a screen on his left flank, and marched straight towards the French left. His columns at some points were little more than a cannon-shot from Soult's front. But the British were on the high-road; the muddy side tracks and the sodden plain made movement for the French difficult, and with amazing daring Wellington carried his army safely round the French army, and gained the Valmusa River, where he halted at nightfall. He had turned Soult's flank, in a word, while Soult was trying to turn his flank, and so gained a position in the rear of the army that, only a few hours before, had been threatening him in front. As a feat of tactical audacity it would be difficult to surpass this; for the French had 12,000 fine cavalry, and two guns to every one in Wellington's batteries.

"Marmont, closing with a short, quick turn, a falcon striking at an eagle," says Napier, "received a buffet that broke his pinions and spoiled his flight. Soult, a wary kite, sailing slowly and with a wide wheel to seize a helpless prey, lost it altogether."

From that point the pursuit slackened. On the 20th the British were across the Agueda, and the

campaign of 1812, with its triumphs and failures, its one shining victory, and its long remembered retreat, was ended. But during those five toilsome weeks, Wellington's army lost 9000 men by death, capture or desertion, the killed and wounded at the siege of Burgos being included in this number. Those figures, indeed, are inadequate. "The real effects of the retreat," Grattan says, "only began to be felt after the retreat itself was ended. The soldiers while in action or in a state of activity had not time to get ill; but when they went into cantonments more than half the survivors of the retreat were attacked with fever or dysentery. The men died by tens, twenties, thirties."

More than 800 stragglers were during the last two or three days picked up by Julian Sanchez and brought into Ciudad by his guerillas, but the losses in some of the regiments were terrible. The 82nd lost 200 men, even the light-hearted, hard-fighting 88th lost heavily. When the retreat ended Wellington issued a "general order" to the army, a document which set the entire army swearing as energetically as ever did our soldiers in Flanders, and with better reason. Discipline, Wellington said,

"had deteriorated during the campaign in a greater degree than he had ever witnessed or ever read of in any army, and this without any disaster, any unusual privation or hardship save that of inclement weather."

"The officers had lost all command over their men.

No army had ever made shorter marches in retreat or had longer rests. No army had ever been so little pressed by a pursuing enemy. The loss of 'tone' and discipline in the army," Wellington declared, "was to be traced to the habitual neglect of duty by the regimental officers." That famous and bitterly-hated document was in reality a circular letter addressed to the superior officers, not meant for publication; and though Wellington would never withdraw it, yet in conversation he admitted its injustice. It made no distinction betwixt the regiments that behaved ill and those that behaved well. It reflects a defect in his qualities as a general. He had an imperfect sympathy—due in part, perhaps, to the aristocratic strain in his nature, and in part to the hardness of his temper—with the crowd. The quick and generous sympathy which enables even a great man to understand the nature, or realise the limitations, or be touched by the sufferings of small men, was missing in him. The army to him was a tool, and he had a good workman's passion, not only for honest work, but for good tools. And now the great tool by which he was trying to achieve a supreme task—the army—failed him. Its steel had lost its temper, its edge its sharpness.

The campaign had brought to Wellington personally many honours. After the capture of Ciudad he had been raised a step in the peerage with the

title of Earl of Wellington; after Salamanca he received the order of the Spanish Golden Fleece, and had been appointed generalissimo of the Spanish armies. He had received a grant of £100,000 from Parliament; had been made a marquis in England, a duke in Portugal. But the personal mortifications of the campaign left him bitter. It was a cruel anti-climax to win at Badajos and fail at Burgos; to overthrow Marmont and 40,000 men in forty minutes, and to be hustled back to Ciudad by one of Marmont's generals.

But it is clear that Wellington did not assess justly the sufferings of his troops in the retreat from Burgos. The comparison with Moore's retreat in time and distance, which is usually made, is plausible and striking; but it is misleading, and the factors have to be taken into account. Wellington had a worse army than that of Moore; worse, because less purely British; worse in texture of discipline, and in the quality of its officers. Wellington's veterans lay dead in nameless graves round Ciudad and Badajos. He had no Craufurd to command his rear-guard, and though he had a Paget as second in command, he was not to be compared with that other Paget — the dashing cavalry leader who shattered the cavalry of the Imperial Guard at Castro Gonsalo, and captured its commander, under the very eyes of Napoleon.

Moore's army, it may be added, had no such taint in its blood as the sack of Ciudad and Badajos left in Wellington's divisions. All the memoirs of the period dwell on the curious loss of morale in the troops. William Napier, who had taken command of the 43rd—one of the finest regiments in the Peninsula—had to flog a number of his men within reach of the enemy's guns at Salamanca, and while skirmishing was going on all about them. "They were the ringleaders," he says, "of 200 who had actually mutinied." It was not cowardice that inspired the mutiny; they were the very men who had shown such desperate valour on the breach at Badajos; it was simply lawlessness.

The sufferings of the retreat were great. Grattan, in the "Connaught Rangers," whose whole story is written in accents of gaiety, tells the tale lightly, but with an unconscious art which is very impressive. "The rain," he says, "fell in torrents," the roads were quagmires, the streams became rivers, the rivers were fordless. "The retreat each day began at four in the morning, while the night was black; at ten o'clock the enemy were on our heels, when the rear had to face about and fight." Those who were not fighting stood behind in their ragged uniforms, most of them shoeless and ankle deep in mud. Multitudes of them suffered from constant ague. Grattan's servant told him that "the jaws of the boys with the ague, when they

rattled so, reminded him of the castanets of Madrid."

"When night fell, we slept," says Grattan, "in the open country without shelter, our clothes saturated with rain, half the men and officers without shoes, nothing to eat, or at all events no means of cooking it. Often when a halt took place, while the rear line was fighting, those behind fell down asleep, and as often it was next to impossible to waken them, so much were they exhausted, and they were abandoned to their fate." "Wellington," he says, "did his part on the grand scale, but those who acted under him were deficient in every way. Many of the officers were young lads, badly clothed, with scarcely a shoe or a boot to their feet, some attacked with dysentery, others with ague, and more with a burning fever raging in their blood. The different bivouacs each morning presented a sad spectacle, worn-out veterans or young lads unable to move abandoned to their fate."

It is a melancholy story, and shows the dark side of war.

The retreat from Burgos profoundly disappointed public opinion, both in the Peninsula and in Great Britain. On June 13 Wellington led a gallant army of 40,000 men across the Agueda; the splendour of the great sieges lay behind it, the splendour of Salamanca and of Madrid before it. But on November 19 the disordered and ragged survivors of that army recrossed the Agueda in a condition almost as bad as the survivors of Moore's retreat to Corunna. There was no final gleam of victory after the retreat of 1812, such as closed that of Moore in 1809. All the criticisms of the war—and what war did Great

Britain ever wage which did not kindle bitter home-grown criticism?—grew shrill. If, in the fifth year of the war, and when, at such vast cost of blood and gold, the French had been driven out of Portugal, the British in turn were flung back in ruin from Spain, what hope of ultimate success survived?

But Wellington's sure vision looked through the dust of temporary disaster. War, like the tides, has its ebb and flow. And Wellington could see that, in spite of his retreat from Burgos, he had pierced the shield of French defences; he had shaken the fabric of French rule in the Peninsula to its base. He was certainly no boaster. He loved to describe great events in homely, or even half-cynical, prose. But on the results of the campaign of 1812 he writes to Lord Bathurst, with a certain proud self-assertion not common on his lips.

He describes the campaign as "the most successful campaign in all its circumstances, and has produced for the cause more important results than any campaign in which a British army has been engaged for the last century. . . . In the months elapsed since January this army has sent to England little short of 20,000 prisoners, and they have taken and destroyed, or have themselves the use of, the enemy's arsenals in Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajos, Salamanca, Valladolid, Madrid, Astorgo, Seville, the lines before Cadiz, &c.; and upon the whole we have taken and

destroyed, or we now possess, little short of 3000 pieces of cannon."

These are very wonderful results to have been achieved by a campaign which ended in such a retreat as has been described.

CHAPTER XVIII

VITTORIA

"Salamanca relieved the whole of Spain at once, changed the character of the war there, and was felt even in Russia. Vittoria freed the Peninsula altogether, broke up the armistice at Dresden, and so led to Leipsic, and the deliverance of Europe."—WELLINGTON.

EUROPE, it must be remembered, during 1812, had watched not one retreat, but two. On June 18, only five days before Wellington with an army of 40,000 crossed the Agueda and began his march to Salamanca and Madrid, Napoleon crossed the Niemen with one of 400,000 on his way to Moscow. He began his retreat from Moscow on October 19, three days before Wellington turned his back on Burgos. The French crossed the Beresina—one of the most tragical stories in the history of war—on November 26–28, less than ten days after Wellington had put his hungry and footsore regiments into their cantonments round Ciudad. The coincidence of dates is dramatic; but Napoleon's failure outscales that of Wellington; it was Titanic. He left behind him under Russian snows, or in Russian prisons, practically the whole of the Grand Army. He returned

to find all the great Powers of Europe rising against him. The spell of his prestige, which so long had paralysed and terrified the imagination of the nations, was broken. And the rising tide of revolt against the oppression of Napoleon's power consoled Great Britain, if it did not help her to forget the retreat from Burgos. It quickened the pulse of warlike energy in her very blood.

In his recent campaign Wellington, on his part, had seen with nearer and surer vision, and had assessed more profoundly, both the strength and the weakness of the French in Spain, and as a result he framed the plan of a new campaign, on a scale more daring than anything he had yet attempted. His plans this time did not stop short of Salamanca, or turn aside to Madrid. They swept onward across the Tormes and the Carrion, beyond Valladolid and Burgos, to the Pyrenees and to France. It was a great conception, uninspired, and unshared by any other brain.

Each campaign in the Peninsula, it may be added, was for Wellington a new lesson in the perilous business of war, and in his characteristic fashion he turned the grim experience of the campaign of 1812 to practical use for the greater adventure he meditated in 1813. He had learned the weakness of his own army, and he set himself with resolute energy to strengthen it. Reinforcements flowed in from Great Britain, especially cavalry; but what the army

needed was not so much new men as a new spirit, and a new equipment. Discipline in the Portuguese army was roughly restored by Beresford, and it was braced afresh with equal energy in the British regiments. Every department was reorganised. Officers who had proved inefficient were sent home or dismissed. Malingerers at the depots and in the hospitals were hunted out. Under this process the 2nd Division alone, in one month, recovered 600 bayonets.

Wellington had never forgotten the shoeless, hunger-bitten, half-naked regiments that splashed their way along the muddy roads from Burgos, and slept unsheltered beneath the incessant rains, and he re-cast the whole equipment of the army. The hospitals were reorganised, tents were provided, every private carried a second pair of shoes in his knapsack, a better type of commissariat cart was invented, the very camp kettles were made on a new pattern. The success of a campaign, a good general knows, depends on the health and vigour of the men in the ranks, and in the minutest detail, and with a vigilance that nothing escaped, Wellington made provision for this. Those regiments of shoeless vagrants outside Burgos were to have no successors in 1813. He knew, too, like every great captain, that in war moral forces count for perhaps even more than physical, and he studied how to raise the morale of his regiments. In all the British canton-

ments sport was encouraged; every regiment had its games. Amongst the officers walking clubs were organised; Wellington himself had his hunting pack; a spirit of gaiety ran through the British camps.

Great Britain, some shrewd critic has said, always begins war unprepared, and is most fit to carry it on—and is most formidable—when the other side wants to leave off. And in 1813, after nearly twenty years of war, the national energy showed no sign of lessening. With a population of only 18,000,000, Great Britain maintained a fleet that commanded every sea, while her land forces rose to 800,000 men. Generous reinforcements were despatched to Spain. Wellington, in the spring of 1813, found himself at the head of an army of 70,000 men, 40,000 of whom were British. This was the army of which he said afterwards that, with it, "he could have gone anywhere and done anything." When it crossed the Pyrenees it was, for its size, perhaps the most efficient fighting force at that moment in existence. Many of its regiments might have been classed with Cæsar's Tenth Legion, or with the Macedonian phalanx of Alexander. They could scatter—as Waterloo proved—the Old Guard of Napoleon.

Wellington, of course, still had his troubles. A commander who had to work at once with the Portuguese Regency, the Spanish Cortes, and the

British Cabinet might well need the patience of a saint, as well as the genius of a statesman. There is no space here to tell the tale of the folly of the Spanish Cortes, of the breakdown of Portuguese administration, and of the restlessness of the intrigues of both nations. The common people in both countries were loyal and patient; but Spain in 1813 was what Sir John Moore described it as being in 1808, "a country without armies and without a government." And in Portugal during Wellington's campaign in Spain, the Regency so systematically failed in its duty that the Portuguese battalions seemed likely to perish. The field artillery disappeared; there was, says Napier, "no money in the military chests, no recruits in the depots, no transport service in the field. . . . No fault was punished by the Regency, and everywhere knaves triumphed." As a mere detail of his campaign Wellington had to restore order and quicken efficiency in the administration of both nations, and this cast on him work which seemed utterly remote from the business of a soldier. His despatches reflect what may be called the non-military side of his life. He had to discuss schemes of finance while digging trenches in front of Burgos, to analyse the plan for a Portuguese bank from the very battlefield of Salamanca, and write a treatise on the sale of church property during the retreat from Burgos itself.

If Wellington's new plan of campaign was daring to the point of audacity, it was yet very simple. There were 230,000 French troops in Spain, distributed across the Peninsula from Valencia on the eastern sea-coast, to Asturias on the north-west. Caffarelli, in the north, guarded the line of communication with France; Drouet covered Madrid and central Spain; Reille from beyond the Tormes commanded what was still called "the army of Portugal," though the possibility of its ever touching Portuguese soil again had vanished. Wellington thus had in his immediate front 110,000 good French soldiers, though they badly wanted good generals. The French expected Wellington's advance to be against their centre; and while he was busy re-equipping his regiments in their cantonments beyond the Agueda, they were absorbed in the task of strengthening the line of defences on the Douro and the Tormes. All the bridges on the Douro were destroyed, huge entrenchments stretched for miles on its farther bank; for the French, like good soldiers, had learned something from Torres Vedras.

But Wellington had no intention of operating again in the wasted districts on the Tormes. He wanted, it is true, to fix the attention of the French on that point. To maintain the illusion that he intended to strike at the centre, he kept his head-quarters at Ciudad. He placed Hill at Coria, and

formed magazines there, so as to leave his enemies uncertain, whether he might not strike at their left across the Tagus. But his real plan was secretly to organise a column of 40,000 men, which should cross the Douro within the Portuguese frontier, and turn with a wide sweep the French left, marching through the apparently trackless wilds of the Tras os Montes to the Esla, and beyond it to the Ebro. All the positions the French had strengthened with such toil would thus be turned in succession, and without a shot being fired. When the French, under the stress of this movement, fell back at the centre, Wellington would push on with Hill, and bring the retreating French to bay far to the north. Somewhere at the base of the Pyrenees the campaign planned on such a scale was to reach its climax.

This strategy, in a sense, violated all the rules of war. Wellington was dividing his army in the presence of an enemy greater in numbers than himself, and holding a central position. If Masséna had been in command on the Douro instead of Joseph or Drouet, Wellington would hardly have attempted a strategy so daring. What would have happened him if, while Graham with 40,000 men was lost in the hill passes of the Tras os Montes, and Hill was whole marches distant at Coria, 70,000 French had broken out upon Wellington on the Agueda?

But Wellington assessed, with keen divination,

the personal elements in the equation. There was no Masséna, or Soult, or Marmont, at the French headquarters. The French armies were standing on the defensive, their eyes turned north, not south; to the Pyrenees rather than to Lisbon. There is a genius that obeys rules; but there is also a genius which, while disregarding rules, attains the ends for which they exist; and Wellington showed this genius in shaping the campaign of 1813.

Meanwhile Napoleon, while giving much good advice to Joseph, was draining his army of good troops. The advice was admirable. Joseph was told he must forget he was a king, and remember only that he was a general. He must exchange Madrid for the camp. He must concentrate at the vital point—Valladolid—the armies of the south, of the centre, and of Portugal, putting down all the, as yet, unsuppressed outbreaks of guerilla warfare on his flanks and in his rear. He must hold a position which seemed to threaten Portugal; and "so make Wellington feel that his whole strength was needed for its defence; that he must cover Lisbon strongly, or expect to see a French army marching on that capital."

But Joseph was incapable of understanding this advice, still less of acting on it. "I cannot," he wrote, "be King of Spain and general of the French"; yet he was unwilling to see any French general with an authority greater than his own.

Napoleon, however, fighting for his existence in Central Europe, could do nothing more for Joseph. He recalled the Young Guard from Spain, and with it the *élite* of many regiments, both officers and men, and sent in their places raw levies. French armies in Spain, if not lessened in number, were lowered in quality. They lacked adequate generalship; they were standing on the defensive—an attitude which does not suit French genius; and the dark, far-stretching shadow of Napoleon's failure in Russia cast a chill on every French camp in Spain.

On June 18 the great movement began. Graham was put in command of the columns, 40,000 strong—infantry, cavalry, guns, with pontoon bridges in sections—which were to cross the trackless, wind-blown summits of the Tras os Montes, ford its swift rivers, pierce its gloomy defiles, and reach the Esla. It was an amazing march. The hill-crests were ridges of splintered rocks, their slopes were rent with chasms, the tracks by which the army travelled were often fit only for goats. Guns had to be lowered by ropes over precipices, and dragged up by sheer strength of human arms.

Craufurd would have been an ideal leader for such an army, engaged in such a march. But Graham was sixty-seven years of age; up to middle life he had been a country gentleman of studious habits and quiet tastes. Grief, in a sense, made him a soldier. The sudden death of his wife, after a happy

wedded life of seventeen years, made the quiet of ordinary existence intolerable to him, so he joined the army; and, by virtue of his Scottish stock, he had many of the qualities a soldier needs—hardihood of body, a certain gift for command, and a dour courage—as Barossa showed—which not all the tumult of battle, nor the worst blows of ill-fortune, could shake. His rank and wealth secured quick promotion; and Wellington, who loved a hard fighter, who was also fond of field sports—and of a gentleman—welcomed Graham when he joined his army in 1812.

Larpent, who met Graham at Wellington's head-quarters just before the campaign began, describes him as "a very fine old man"; "but," he adds, "he does not look quite fit for this country work." Yet Graham was the man whom Wellington chose to take charge of that part of his operations which would most severely tax the physical endurance and the compelling, masterful energy of a commander; and Graham did his work splendidly. His divisions crossed the Douro, near Oporto itself, on May 18, and their march was pushed on without check, while the French were absolutely unconscious of the thunderbolt about to fall on their right wing. They were still ignorant so late as May 24 that an army of 40,000 men had turned their flank, and was pushing on for the Esla, and even for the Ebro. Wellington broke up his head-

quarters at Freneda on the 22nd, and joined Graham on the 30th, as his columns reached the Esla. Picton was riding with Wellington when they crossed the rivulet which marks the Portuguese boundary. He says that Wellington "wheeled his horse round, took off his hat, and cried, 'Farewell, Portugal; I shall never see you again.'"

He was saying farewell to more than "Portugal." He was turning his back on retreats and uncertainties, on dependence upon Spanish allies and battles with Portuguese intrigues. Much water had run under the bridge since he had sat with Cuesta, planning, in terms to suit that obstinate Spanish brain, the tactics of Talavera. He himself was another man; richer in prestige, wiser in battle-lore, surer of himself and of his army; surer, too, in his knowledge of the forces he had to meet.

As Graham pushed on, and the French awoke to the tempest of war about to break upon them from the summits of the Tras os Montes, they fell back in haste. One strong position after another became worthless. The line of the Douro, with all its defences, was given up, Madrid was abandoned, never again to see a French garrison. On the high plains round Burgos, Joseph, for a moment, dreamed of offering battle. The traditions of the place were encouraging. This was the spot where Wellington failed in 1812, and from which his

retreat began. But Graham was pushing on inexorably, threatening the communications with France, and Burgos was abandoned. The castle was mined and blown up with such haste that the explosion took place as a column of infantry was defiling past the walls, and 300 men were instantly slain. Wellington, a year before, could not win Burgos with the guns and bayonets of his troops; he won it now, without the expenditure of a cartridge, by the skill of his strategy. It was French gunpowder that blew up Burgos, and at a sore cost to French lives; but it was Wellington's genius that fired the match.

The blast of the explosion sent a wave of deep sound over all the hill summits, and through the ravines for many miles; and years afterwards Wellington told Croker a curious story. He was within a few miles of Burgos, and heard the sullen thunder of the explosion, and saw the clouds of black smoke rising slowly into the sky, and his military instinct told him what had happened. "But," he added, "when I heard and saw this explosion, I made a sudden resolution—instanter to cross the Ebro, and endeavour to push the French *at once* to the Pyrenees." It is difficult to read the mind of a great soldier, and who can tell the relation betwixt that sudden blast of sound, that seemed to shake the Spanish skies, and the answering expansion of purpose in the mind of

Wellington? With what mystic vibrations were the cells of his brain stirred by that strange air-wave?

The emphasis in Wellington's story lies on the words "at once." To push the French beyond the Pyrenees was his accepted goal; but when he drew the plan for the campaign on which he was then engaged, it stopped short south of the Pyrenees. Perhaps the terrific blast of sound in which Burgos passed away—Burgos, which a year before had proved impregnable to him—gave Wellington a sudden vision of the range and energy of his strategy. It was the tramp of Graham's battalions, far off in the wild hill passes of the Tras os Montes, which shook Burgos into dust; and still Graham's columns were pushing on. They would shake a mightier fabric than that of Burgos—the whole fabric of French power in Spain—to ruin.

On June 3 the line of the Douro was mastered; on the 6th the British were over the Carrion. On the 15th Hill crossed Puente Arenas, and the French were thus suddenly cut off from the sea-coast. Port after port was abandoned. Some British ships of war sailed into Santander, and Wellington, abandoning the line to Ciudad, made this port his base.

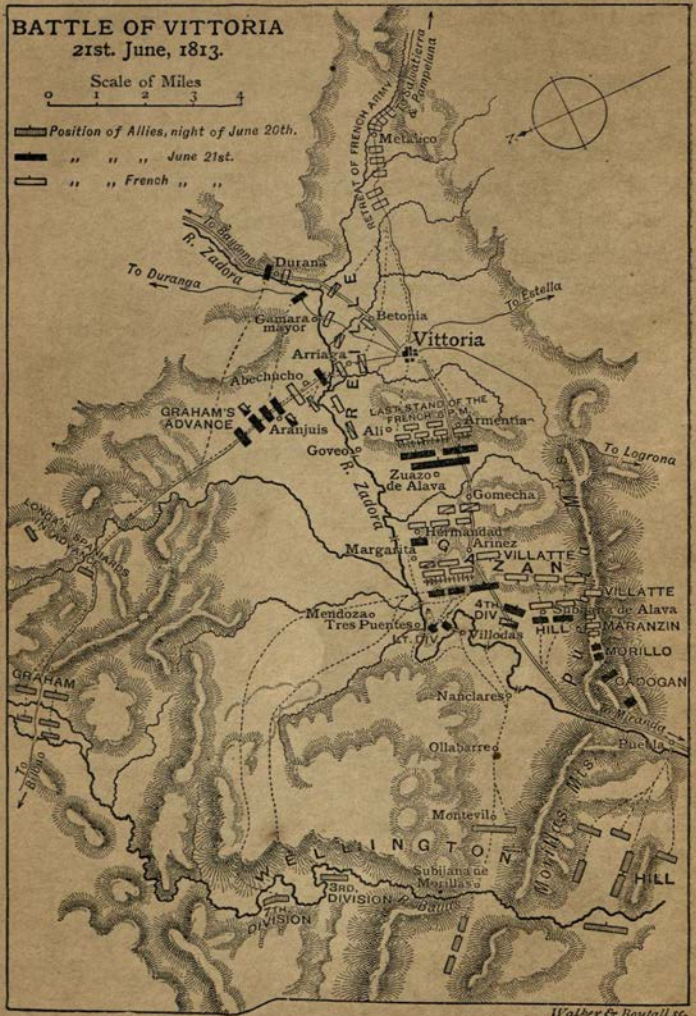
Having crossed the Ebro, Wellington swung round and marched for the great Bilboa road, and for Vittoria, the deep valleys echoing to the rattle of his guns and the tramp of his battalions. At Modena

he left the 6th Division to guard his stores and supplies, but pushed on his columns with tireless energy. For six days, in spite of ravines and precipices, of swift torrents and rough hill-crests, the march was urged. On the seventh his columns broke through the hills, coming by many separate defiles. Vittoria was in sight. Wellington had gained the advantage, not of a battle, but of many battles, almost without cost. Napier, in prose which has the resonance of a bugle, describes the effects of Wellington's strategy. Great rivers—the Esla, the Tormes, the Douro, the Carrion—seemed to be dried up; the rocks, the mountains, the deep ravines were levelled; "Clausel's strong positions, Dubreton's thundering castle, vanished like dreams; 60,000 veteran soldiers, willing to fight at every step, were hurried with all the tumult and disgrace of defeat across the Ebro." How was it that an army of gallant and disciplined soldiers, with good officers, was driven like a flock of sheep across a country rich in positions capable of easy defence? "That soul of armies," Napier says, "the mind of a great commander, was wanting." It was wanting for the French; but "the mind of a great commander" was thrilling every fibre of the British forces with its purpose.

Vittoria, the scene of the battle that finally destroyed French power in Spain, is a basin in the Biscayan hills, eight miles broad by ten miles in

length. In shape, to use a familiar figure, it resembles a bottle. The hills which define the basin are square at the western base; they run eastward in parallel lines, but suddenly tumble in and form the neck of the "bottle." Vittoria itself is in the neck of the "bottle," and may be described as its cork. The basin is the meeting-place of five highways, the great road to Bayonne being the chief; and along these five roads for weeks before, not only the baggage of the retreating French armies, but the plunder of a kingdom had crowded.

Two convoys had been sent off into France, but still the plain was congested with carriages and waggons, camp-followers and Spanish officials, the whole court equipage of Joseph himself, the wives—or, more frequently, the mistresses—of the French officers. It was a French officer, indeed, who, after the battle, told Wellington, "You had an army, and we were 'un bordel ambulant.'" Plunder was the familiar habit of the French, from camp-follower to King Joseph. In that predatory monarch's carriage, captured after the battle, were found bundles of famous pictures, cut from their frames and rolled up, which he was carrying off as booty. The business of plunder, indeed, was raised by the French in Spain to a fine art. But now a hundred rifled cities and convents, colleges and palaces—to say nothing of cottages—were to be avenged. In their last great battle in Spain that accumulated


BATTLE OF VITTORIA
21st. June, 1813.
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4
Position of Allies, night of June 20th.
" " " June 21st.
" " French " "
LINE OF RETREAT OF FRENCH ARMY
To Salvatierra & Pampeluna
Mendoza
To Bayonne
R. Zadora
Durana
To Duranga
To Petella
Gamara mayor
Betonia
Vittoria
Arriaga
Abechucho
GRAHAM'S ADVANCE
Aranjuis
LAST STAND OF THE FRENCH 6 P.M.
Armentia
Ali
Goveo
To Logrona
Zuazo de Alava
Gomecha
Hermandad
Arinez
Margarita
VILLATTE
LONDON'S SPANIARDS ADVANCE
Mendoza
Tres Puentes
4TH DIV.
1ST. DIV.
Villodas
HILL
Subijana de Alava
MARANZIN
MORILLO
GRAHAM
CADOGAN
Nanclares
Miranda
Ollabarreo
Puebla
Montevilo
WELLINGTON
Subijana de Morillas
3RD. DIVISION
7TH DIVISION
HILL
Walker & Boutall sc.

booty—the plunder of a nation—was a snare and a disaster.

The Zadora, a sunken and narrow stream, runs from Vittoria westward down the whole length of the plain, and parallel with the northern wall of hills. When it reaches the base it turns at a sharp angle southwards, and finally breaks through the south-western angle of the "bottle" by the Puebla defile, and makes its way toward the Ebro. Joseph's army, 70,000 strong, was drawn up on a low ridge running across the plain, with its right on the Zadora, its left touching the southern line of hills. The Zadora, swinging sharply to the south, covered the French front like a trench, but no one of the seven bridges across the Zadora had been broken down, and not all of them were efficiently guarded. The second line of Joseph's army was on a loftier ridge parallel with the first; behind that, and on a plateau still a little higher, stood the town of Vittoria itself. On the morning of the fight the whole ordered mass of the French army, line above line, was visible at a glance. Its front, from the Zadora to the southern range, covered five miles. The infantry were in columns; masses of cavalry, with the early sun reflected from helmet and scabbard, were in reserve, guns frowned from every rising point. Surtees, who looked on that scene from the flank of the Rifle Brigade, says: "The French appeared almost as numerous as grass-hoppers. On the plain between the Zadora and the

mountains the troops seemed to stand so thick that you might imagine you could walk on their heads." It was a formidable army.

Wellington's plan of battle was a replica in miniature of the strategy of the whole campaign. He attacked at three points. Graham with 18,000 was to march outside the northern wall of hills, to swing in at the neck, and seize the great Bayonne road, and so plug the "bottle" up. Hill with the right wing was to force the Puebla Pass, and clambering along the heights, strike at the French left. When Graham had reached the point where his menace of the great road was felt, then Wellington himself was to cross the bridges of the Zadora and smite at the French centre.

Wellington was again dividing his forces in the presence of an enemy. When Graham with 18,000 men marched off behind the northern hills, Wellington was repeating deliberately, and on a larger scale, the movement which ruined Marmont at Salamanca. He was separating his left wing from his centre. But there was no great commander on the French side to punish that fault—to crush Graham's isolated force, or to pour in overwhelming strength on Wellington's own centre. Wellington, once more, was assessing the personal elements in the equation, and risking the fight on his judgment of them.

Vittoria was fought on June 21, the longest

summer day Spain knows. A faint mist lay on the landscape for the first hour; then it passed away; and, set in a frame of blue hills, with almost cloudless, sun-filled skies above, the tumult, the smoke, and slaughter of the last of the great battles in the Peninsular War awoke. The battle had to be run upon a time-table. Hill was not to move till Graham had reached the point where he could prick the great road; Wellington was not to move till Hill and Graham had shaken the French flank and rear. The French apparently never discovered Graham's movement, a fact which once more shows that the soul of an army, the mind of a great commander was missing.

At the first faint pulses of sound from the east, telling that Graham had begun, Hill made his attack on the Puebla Range, a Spanish brigade leading. The Spaniards fought well; two armies were watching them. They climbed with the agility of mountaineers up the steep hill-slope to its very crest; then the French charged, and flung them with cruel slaughter down the rough slope. The 71st, led by Cadogan, took up the task where the Spaniards had failed, and the Highlanders were not to be denied. They fell fast under the bitter fire of the French; the brown sides of the hill were strewn with their dead; but up to the crest, and over it, the Highlanders went,

and the French hold on the hill was roughly broken. No regiment fought better that day than the 71st, and none sustained greater loss. Out of 1000 men who stood in the line when the battle began, only 300 piled arms at the end of the day. Amongst the slain, and long mourned by his regiment, was Cadogan, perhaps the most promising soldier that fell in the whole battle.

The attack on the French left, it is to be noted, had some curious features. It was made at first with a single battalion of Spaniards; later a single British regiment, the 71st, was sent to support the Spaniards. This was trying to displace an army with a pin-prick. If the attempt to turn the French left was serious, why was it made in a fashion so ineffective? The truth is, the movement was nothing better than a trick. Wellington wanted to tempt the French to strengthen their left wing, believing this to be the point of danger, and so weaken their centre, where he meant to strike.

Graham's guns far off to the east were now answering the sound of Hill's volleys on the flanks of the Puebla Range, and Wellington moved. To carry the bridges of the Zadora, commanded by the muskets and artillery of a French army, might have been a bloody task; but just as the battalions were about to move, a peasant brought the news that one of the bridges was unguarded, and Barnard's Rifles were at once sent across.

They followed a white, curving road up the slope to an old chapel, and there Barnard halted his men. On either side of the Rifles, as they halted, and almost within musket shot, battalions of French infantry were standing quietly. A French gun fired a couple of shots at the intrusive British as they went at the double past the chapel, and one of the shots killed the peasant who had given information as to the bridge; but there was no movement to thrust this impertinent British battalion, which had apparently strayed into the midst of a French army, back into the river.

The British had to fight for the other bridges, but the possession of one made the task easy, as the Rifles were able to take the defenders of bridge after bridge in flank. Picton, with his division, was in position opposite one of the bridges; he had marked the line of advance, and as the sound of battle awoke where Hill was moving, and bridge after bridge near him was carried, and no order came for him to move, he grew furiously impatient. Had Wellington committed that most fatal of blunders—forgotten the "Fighting Third"? As Kincaid tells the story: "He rode to and fro in front of his men, watching the fight, fuming to plunge into it, and beating the mane of his horse angrily with his stick." An aide-de-camp, riding at speed, came up, and inquired where Lord Dalhousie, who commanded the 7th Division, was.

Picton, in wrathful tones, declared he knew nothing of Lord Dalhousie; were there any orders for him? "None," said the aide-de-camp. "Then, pray, sir," demanded the indignant Picton, "what orders do you bring?" The aide-de-camp explained that Dalhousie was to carry the bridge to the left, and the 4th and 6th Divisions were to support the attack. The "Fighting Third," in brief, were to look on as spectators while other divisions did the work! Rising in his stirrups, Picton shouted, in tones of passion to the astonished aide-de-camp, "You may tell Lord Wellington from me, sir, that the 3rd Division, under my command, shall in less than ten minutes attack the bridge and carry it, and the 4th and 6th Divisions may support if they choose." Then, turning to his men, who were chafing for the fight, he cried, "Come on, ye rascals! Come on, ye fighting villains!" And, let loose with those paternal epithets, Picton's "fighting villains" promptly carried the bridge.

When the first line of their centre was broken, no touch of a commander's skill helped the French. Hill was pricking their left flank at the point where it touched the ridge, Graham was striking at the only road by which they could retreat. Wellington watched the struggle with the eye of a great captain, till his pin-prick had succeeded. The French had weakened their centre to strengthen their left wing, and as a result the hill in front

of the Arinez, the key to the second line held by the French, was only lightly held. Then catching up Picton's Division, he carried it in close columns of regiments, and at a running pace, diagonally across the front of both armies, and seized the hill. Oddly enough, it was known by the name of the "Englishman's Hill." More than four centuries before — in 1366 — a detachment of the Black Prince's army was cut to pieces there, and Conan Doyle has woven the story into his romance of "The White Company." And now, after so many centuries, the feet of charging Englishmen were racing up the slopes of that historic hill.

The seizure of the hill was the crisis of the battle. L'Estrange, who was with the 31st, says: "I heard a tremendous rush on our left; the ground seemed actually to quake under me; and looking in the direction of the sound, I saw the whole British host — artillery, cavalry, infantry —throwing themselves on the line of the French army. Three or four regiments of cavalry were at that moment charging. . . . It was too much for the nerves of the French; they turned in retreat along their whole line, and the battle of Vittoria was won."

At six o'clock on that long summer evening the French stood on the last ridge they held in front of Vittoria. Behind them was the city; beyond it were thousands of carriages and baggage-waggons,

a vast multitude of non-combatants, men, women, and children, all in the distraction of flight. As the British guns, coming up, sent pulses of menacing sound over that agitated crowd, the whole mass with every blast of the cannon would wave like a human sea. A murmur of terror went up. But, to quote Napier, "there was no hope, no stay for army or multitude." It was the wreck of a nation.

The one gleam of generalship on the French side was shown by Reille. Graham's column consisted of 18,000 men of all arms; Reille held the bridges on the upper Zadora, and guarded the great road with little more than two-thirds of that number—10,000 infantry and 2500 cavalry. And yet the Frenchmen kept Graham at bay. The bridges were won, and lost, again and again, and there was much hard fighting, but on Graham's part not much generalship, as the river might have been passed both above and below the bridges. From twelve o'clock almost till sunset — until, indeed, the tumult of Wellington's battle coming up told that the fight was lost, and squadrons of British cavalry who had ridden through Vittoria were threatening his rear—Reille held his post.

By sunset Graham broke through, the road to Bayonne was barred, and the routed French had to swing to the right on the road leading to Salvatiera. "They fled so fast," says Hill's biographer,

"kings, marshals, generals, and men, that the allies, who had been sixteen hours under arms, and had marched three leagues since the day dawned, had no chance of overtaking them." It would be perhaps truer to say that the British were so busy picking up the plunder of the battle that their pursuit lacked vigour.

The night of June 21 fell upon such a scene as earthly battlefields have not often witnessed. The vast booty of plundered Spain congested the roads. It was not merely an army in flight. It seemed, writes a soldier who took part in the battle, "as if all the domestic animals in the world had been brought to this spot, with all the utensils of husbandry, and all the finery of palaces mixed up in one heterogeneous mass"; and all, it may be added, swept simultaneously into a whirlwind of distracted flight. Ten days after the battle, with the exception of the garrisons holding San Sebastian and Pampeluna, and Suchet's forgotten and irrelevant army in Catalonia, not a French soldier remained in Spain. Three armies had been blown, as if by the very winds, through the defiles of the Pyrenees.

And yet the odd fact remains that, as far as the rank and file of the French army was concerned, they did not feel they were beaten. The routed army was certainly not broken in spirit. The victors in this fight, as a matter of fact, lost almost as much as the defeated, and four weeks afterwards

Soult was able to weave the wrecks of that flying host into the hard-fighting army which held the defiles of the Pyrenees so stubbornly against Wellington.

Vittoria might almost be described, indeed, as a battle in which the French were routed, but not beaten. The rout is undeniable. An army of 55,000 men was shattered out of military form, all its guns except two were taken; its baggage, its military chests, the very baton of its general, and Joseph's regalia and sword of state were all captured. "I have taken more guns from these fellows in the last action," Wellington wrote to Malcolm, "than I took at Assaye without much more loss upon about 70,000 men engaged. . . . They cannot stand us now at all." But the battle was lost through helpless generalship in its leaders, not through want of fighting-power in the ranks. It is probable, of course, that if Napoleon himself, Masséna, or Soult, or Marmont, had held the field at Vittoria against Wellington, the French would have been defeated; but it would have been a very different defeat, and one which would have cost the British much more. It was helpless generalship that failed to discover, and bar, Graham's march on the French communications. It was helpless generalship that allowed Wellington, at the other end of the valley, to cross the bridges over the Zadora practically without resistance.

It is always interesting to hear a great soldier

explain his own battles, and Wellington once, standing before a large picture of the fight in the billiard-room at Strathfieldsaye, explained Vittoria to Croker:

"I'll show how I won that battle," he said. "The road on the right is the high-road from Madrid to Vittoria. Lord Hill attacked along this road, only further to the right, on some broken, wooded hills. Into them I sent, at first, a small force —one battalion; the French thought that was to be our attack, and drew off from their right and centre to reinforce it. I saw this, and sent another regiment (Cadogan's), and by degrees increased the force there. I had the day before sent Lord Lynedoch, with his corps, to the other side of that little river to our left, and he had been moving unseen behind some hills, till he came on that side quite round the French right. When I saw that he had begun, and that the French were astonished at having us both on the right and the left, I attacked this broken hill in the foreground, and which was the French centre. They had drained it to support their left, and I carried it, and won the battle with great ease and little loss."

One incident of the battle illustrates Wellington's relentless spirit where his orders were disobeyed—or where he thought they were disobeyed—and was long remembered against him. Ramsay, who had brought his guns out, with such magnificent courage, from the French cavalry at Fuentes, and was one of the best officers in the army, had been placed by Wellington in a certain position, and told to remain there till he received instructions to move. As Gleig tells the story, "The English line a little distance off was hard pressed, and a general of division rode up to Ramsay, and asked what he was doing

there. 'The Marquis placed me here,' said Ramsay, 'and here, I suppose, I must remain.' 'The Marquis could not mean you to remain idle here when your guns are so much wanted elsewhere. Follow me,' said the general, and Ramsay took his guns into the fight, and did good service." According to Maxwell, it was an assistant-quartermaster-general who rode up and told Ramsay to join the brigade to which his troop belonged. When the direction of the French retreat was known somebody said, "We have nothing up to stop them there." "Nothing up?" replied Wellington. "What has become of Ramsay and his guns? I placed him exactly where I knew the enemy would defile. Is he not there?" Wellington was told the whole story, but he was inexorable. Ramsay was put under arrest, lost his promotion, and his career was wrecked. He commanded his battery at Waterloo, and Wellington, riding down the line, spoke to him pleasantly; but Ramsay merely bowed in silence; he had not forgiven his commander-in-chief. When Waterloo was ended, Ramsay lay beside his guns—or rather in a hastily dug grave beside them—shot through the heart.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CAMPAIGN IN THE PYRENEES

"Sometimes he was indebted to fortune, sometimes to his natural genius, always to his untiring industry; for he was emphatically a painstaking man."—NAPIER.

THE news of Vittoria profoundly affected affairs on the Continent. It reached the allied monarchs at the château in Silesia, the messenger arriving in the middle of the night.

"Stadion," Wellington told Croker, long afterwards, "as soon as he had read the letter, went immediately along the corridors of the château, knocking at the doors of the Kings and Ministers, and calling them all (with some very *bruyantes* expressions of joy) to get up, for he had good news from Spain. They soon assembled, and seeing that it was a blow that in all probability would deliver Spain, the Austrians took their line, and hostilities recommenced."

The news reached Napoleon at Dresden, and it made him furious. "The event," he wrote on July 3, "is inconceivable. The King could have collected 100,000 picked men, they might have beaten the whole of England." Jourdan was sent to his country residence, and ordered to remain there till he could "explain what had happened." The French Minister of War was instructed to tell the unhappy Joseph

that "his behaviour has never ceased bringing misfortune on my army during the last five years. It is time to make an end of it. There was a world of folly and cowardice in the whole business." Napoleon condensed the story into a furious epigram: "Spain," he said, "had a general too little, and a king too much."

The unfortunate Joseph had emerged from the battle in a very stripped condition. According to Larpent, he had "neither knife or fork, nor a clean shirt with him." He returned to France, and two years later took refuge in America, exchanging the stormy splendours of Madrid for the drowsy quiet and useful occupation of a New Jersey farm. Wellington always described Napoleon's mind as "ungentleman-like," an epithet which, on his lips, expressed everything deserving of human contempt; and he told Croker a story showing how Vittoria brought out the littleness of Napoleon's character.

"He (Wellington) had a beautiful watch, of Paris manufacture, with a map of Spain exquisitely enamelled on the case. Napoleon had ordered it as a present to King Joseph. He was then at Dresden, in the midst of all the preparations and negotiations of the armistice, and, one would think, sufficiently busy with other matters; but when he heard of the battle of Vittoria, he remembered the watch he had ordered for one who he saw would never be King of Spain, and with whom he was angry for the loss of the battle, and he wrote from Dresden to countermand the watch, and, if it should be ready, to forbid its being sent. . . . A gentleman," said Wellington, "would not have taken the moment when the poor devil had lost his château en Espagne to take away his watch also."

Napoleon tried to undo the effect of Vittoria on public opinion by a circular letter which, amongst the many courageous lies which he wrote out in bulletin form, stands pre-eminent. His Ministers were instructed to say that "the French armies were making certain changes in their position, and a somewhat brisk engagement with the English took place at Vittoria, in which both sides lost equally. The French armies, however, carried out the movements in which they were engaged, but the enemy seized about 100 guns which were left without teams at Vittoria, and it is these that the English are trying to pass off as artillery captured on the battlefield." "As for the newspapers," Napoleon wrote to his Minister of War, on August 1, "nothing must be said either of the Vittoria business or of the King." Now, to attenuate a cataclysm like Vittoria into a "somewhat brisk engagement," and to say that in that terrible rout "both sides lost equally," is very picturesque lying. To Napoleon, however, truth and falsehood were simply tools, to be used indifferently as might be convenient.

But while Napoleon tried to trick the world with falsehoods, he did not deceive himself. He recognised the seriousness of the situation created by Vittoria. It was no longer a question of conquering Spain, or of "driving the English to their ships"; it was a question of saving France from an invasion. If Wellington broke out through the Pyrenees with

an army of 60,000 men, his situation in Central Europe would be impossible. He sent for Soult, the best soldier left to him. "You will start," he said, "before ten o'clock this evening, travel incognito, reach Paris on the 4th, obtain the best information from the Minister of War; stay not longer in Paris than twelve hours, but continue your route to take the command of my armies in Spain."

Soult accepted the task loyally, and travelled with such speed that on July 12 he reached Bayonne, crowded with the wrecks of three defeated armies. Clausel, with 18,000 men, had escaped from Spain unsmitten, and by a very lucky accident. Wellington long afterwards told Croker:

"I had made arrangements for falling on Clausel with my whole force; and I should probably have overtaken and defeated him and his army, but that, in spite of my positive orders that there should be no wandering, a certain officer of dragoons chose to be taken prisoner while at dinner in a country house, and Clausel thus became aware of my movements, and turned away so fast, and in such a direction, that I did not choose to follow him."

And so 18,000 Frenchmen escaped capture.

During his whole career Soult never did finer work, or did it with swifter energy, than in the Pyrenees. In an incredibly brief period he had an effective and sufficiently equipped army, 80,000 strong, under his command; and he affected an heroic confidence in the result of the campaign, if he did not really feel it. When he put his columns

in motion on July 25 he issued an address, reminding his troops that Napoleon's birthday was not three weeks distant, and announcing that a proclamation of victory would be issued from Vittoria itself by that date. In war, of course, much may happen in three weeks; and Soult struck swiftly and hard at the British. Betwixt July 25 and August 2 he fought no less than ten battles, all of them fierce in temper and tragical in cost. In those nine days some 20,000 men were killed or wounded. But at the end of the struggle there was no triumphant "proclamation from Vittoria." That gallant army of 80,000 men was struggling back to French soil out of the defiles of the Pyrenees, breathless, shattered, defeated.

The scene of this fierce wrestle was a stretch of precipitous mountains betwixt San Sebastian, on the sea-coast, and Pampeluna, sixty miles to the south of it. Both places were held by strong French garrisons, and Wellington could not leave them in his rear. He blockaded Pampeluna, and committed the siege of San Sebastian to Graham, while he kept guard against Soult's stroke along the sixty miles of mountains betwixt both places. All the advantages of the situation were with Soult. On the northern, or French, side of the mountains movement was easy; all the passes which run north and south lay open to him. But the southern exits of these defiles, which Wellington guarded,

were of quite another character. Impassable ridges rose betwixt one gloomy pass and another; communication betwixt them was slow and difficult.

Wellington, in a word, had to cover the siege of two fortresses, separated by sixty miles of wild country, a country of tremendous wind-blown peaks, and of sunless valleys; while Soult, with 80,000 men, could concentrate his forces, and come storming through the defile at one end of the line in twenty-four hours' less time than Wellington could concentrate for its defence. And the story of the brief and furious campaign in the Pyrenees is the story of exactly such strategy, and of its defeat.

Wellington took up his headquarters at Lazaca, sprinkled his troops by divisions—sometimes by brigades, sometimes by battalions—at the heads of the valleys along that rugged front of sixty miles, and waited for Soult's thrust. He trusted to the stubborn courage of the tiny force guarding each defile to hold the French long enough in check to permit reinforcements coming up for its support.

To compress into a few pages the tale of ten battles, fought within a brief period of nine days, on a floor of mountains so rough—battles in which, taking the losses of both sides, from 22,000 to 25,000 brave men were killed or wounded—is not easy; and in the whole history of the Peninsular War there is perhaps no tale which, for swiftness of movement, valour in fighting, and skill in leadership on both

sides, can be compared with the tale of these nine days. The fighting ebbed and flowed on a great floor of mountains, rough with precipices and forest, threaded with narrow defiles and swift watercourses, the great spinal ridge of the Pyrenees running diagonally across it. Soult brought into action, roughly, 78,000 men; Wellington had 82,000; but a large proportion of these were Spanish or Portuguese, and in addition he had to maintain his hold both on San Sebastian and Pampeluna.

Soult began his movements with a compliment to the British. On the 23rd he issued a general order to his troops, "Let us not," he said, "defraud the enemy of the praise which is due to him. The leadership had been prompt, skilful, and consecutive; the valour and steadiness of the men in the ranks had been praiseworthy." Then at daybreak on the 25th he made his stroke, and that day witnessed two great attempts to break through Wellington's lines. Soult, with 30,000 men, flung himself on the pass of Roncesvalles. It was held by Cole, with the 57th as an advance-guard, and the French advance was stubbornly resisted. The rattle of musketry pealed harshly and long in the echoing defile, 5000 feet above the plains, and Soult lost heavily. Reille's advance-guard, pushing on, were met by a wing of the 20th, the advance of Ross's brigade coming up to join the fight, and the French charged instantly with the bayonet. For

a time Ross was held back. A thick fog drifted down the defile, and, wrapped in its confusion, British and French fiercely struggled together and slew each other. When night came Cole still held the Great Spine; but he had only 11,000 as against 30,000, and in the darkness he fell back.

On the morning of the 26th, Soult despatched one column on his tracks; Reille was sent along the crest of the mountains to seize the passes in Hill's rear; D'Erlon, at the same moment, he hoped, would be pressing his front. With Hill destroyed, or thrust into the mountains, and D'Erlon breaking out of the Maya Pass, and joining him, the whole French army would be astride Wellington's line.

Reille, however, found the track along the crests, wrapped in fog, almost impossible, and after stumbling for some bewildered hours amongst the mists, he came down a lateral valley, and fell into Soult's rear. Picton, meanwhile, marching like a good soldier toward the sound of the guns, had joined Cole, and Soult found him astride a ridge which barred the pass, and forbade approach to Pampeluna.

While Soult thrust himself into the pass of Roncesvalles, D'Erlon, with 18,000 men, forced the Maya defile, held by Hill, Stewart's division being its advance-guard. Stewart, as Albuera showed, was an impetuous and heady fighter, but lacked the cool judgment of a great soldier. His brigades were carelessly posted, and Stewart himself was some

miles off at Elisondo, when at noon D'Erlon's advance-guard showed in the pass. Of six British regiments, amounting to more than 3000 fighting men, only half were in line. A hill on their front, lightly held, was instantly seized by the French advance, but Pringle, whose brigade was the most advanced, brought up the 34th, at a running pace, and flung them on the hill, the 39th and the 28th following. The British fought with desperate valour, but the attacks were unrelated, the men were breathless from their run, and the French gallantly held the hill till the 5th came up, and that "fierce and formidable old regiment," as Napier calls it, was not to be denied. The French were swept from the ridge, and driven down the pass some distance. But they were in overwhelming numbers, and came up at the double again and again. The 71st and 92nd were now in the fighting line, and so dreadful was the slaughter, especially of the 92nd, that the mere piles of dead and wounded for a while embarrassed the advance of the French. Stewart by this time had brought the 82nd into the fight, and, though himself wounded, still maintained the combat. Step by step, however, the British were pushed back. Their ammunition failed, and the men of the 82nd defended a hog's-back of broken rock with stones. At this moment Barnes' brigade arrived and broke into the fight, and as night fell, D'Erlon halted. He had gained ten miles of the

defile; Pampeluna was only twenty-two miles distant; but over 3000 men had fallen that day in the wrestle for the pass.

Wellington, meanwhile, was in the trenches at San Sebastian, on whose insufficient breaches the first assault had been flung, and had failed. The news that Soult was in the passes startled Wellington. He mounted instantly, and rode to the point of danger, first ordering Graham to turn the siege into a blockade, and to embark his guns and stores. Riding at speed towards the threatened point, he set all his detachments marching towards Maya as he passed them.

He was alone as he rode into the British lines. A Portuguese regiment recognised him first, and raised an exultant shout, and the cheer ran, a storm of sound, along the whole British front. As Wellington rode past one regiment, a corporal broke out of the ranks, and with a flourish of his musket, shouted, "There goes the little blackguard that whops the French." Wellington was indifferent both to the jest and the shout, but he was keen to judge the effect of the cheer on the enemy. A group of officers was clearly visible on the French side of the valley, and some one pointed out to Wellington a tall, club-footed figure in the centre of the group. It was Soult. Wellington looked steadily and long at him through his glass, and, as he told Croker long afterwards, "I saw his face so

clearly that years afterwards, when I met him in a Paris drawing-room, I instantly recognised him." "Yonder," said Wellington, "is a great commander, but he is a cautious one, and will wait to ascertain the cause of these shouts. That will give time for the 6th Division to arrive, and I shall beat him." As a matter of fact, that tumult of cheers affected Soult exactly as Wellington guessed it would. He held back his stroke, waiting for D'Erlon, who failed to arrive.

On the 27th, after studying the British on his front, Soult had marked a steep hill commanding the pass, and sent some battalions forward to seize it. Two Spanish regiments held the hill, and Cole took some of his battalions forward at the double to support them; the Spaniards, seeing the British coming up, flung themselves with great courage on the approaching French, and thrust them down the hill. This, says Napier, was for Soult "the stroke of fate." His columns defiling from the narrow valley found the high ridge across their front thick with red-coats; beyond, Picton's divisions held a higher ridge. Soult could not attack instantly, for there was no room to defile, but he sent Clausel's columns to his right up the ridge, and Reille's divisions to the mountains on his left, while Clausel seized the village of Sauroren close under Cole's position. Then the fighting ceased for a time; the two armies were confronting each other along a front of

two miles, and across a deep and narrow valley, when Wellington came up.

D'Erlon had spoiled his commander-in-chief's plans; he failed to pursue Hill with vigour, and to reach Soult in time to give him the mastery in the fighting of the 27th and the 28th. But at noon, on the 28th, he was up, and the battle began afresh; Soult's plan being to fling Clausel's divisions, and part of Reille's, on the ridge held by Cole, and crush 5000 men with 16,000. Clausel, however, struck too soon, and with only a part of his forces; and Wellington replied with what Napier calls "the counter-stroke of Salamanca." Clausel's columns, striving to cut off the regiment which formed Cole's left, were themselves cut off, and, scorched on both flanks with musketry volleys, were almost destroyed.

Stirred by the tumult of the fight at this point, the French divisions along Soult's whole front moved out to the attack. But it was a hurried movement, the columns flinging themselves on the British ridge in succession, and without any relation to each other. The French never fought better, or in more un-French like fashion; for they attacked in silence, moving straight up the hill without firing a shot. One of Clausel's columns, in particular, sallying from the village of Sauroren, swept clean up the hill, brushed aside a Portuguese regiment in their path, and almost reached the crest; then, with a terrible shout, Ross's regiments charged and flung that

column of gallant men down the long, rough slope.

By this time the British ridge was being assailed at a dozen points. It was held by 12,000 men, and attacked by 25,000. Again and yet again the French columns came up, but as often, with silent, desperate bayonet charges, they were flung back. On the French left Reille's brigades roughly shattered the Spanish divisions which stood in the line of their attack, but a Portuguese battalion gallantly took its stand beside the 40th. The men of the 40th waited in disciplined silence till the head of the great French columns showed above the crest, then they ran in with the bayonet and flung them, in utter wreck, down the hill. It was the story of Busaco repeated. Four times Reille's columns came up the slope. The French officers were seen to pull up the tired men by their belts, so resolute were they to win; but always, with actual push of steel, they were driven back. When night fell on that blood-reddened hill the British had lost nearly 2600 men, but they still held the ridge. The fight was described by Wellington himself as "bludgeon work."

On the 29th, Wellington's reinforcements were up, and he had 30,000 men in battle-line. D'Erlon had joined his commander-in-chief with 18,000, but Soult knew he could not break through that wall of steep hills held by such hard-fighting infantry; and, like a great captain, he used the advantages of his

position to effect a clever stroke of tactics. He left a strong force under Reille at Sauroren to "contain" Wellington, and marched at speed, with D'Erlon's column, 18,000 strong, to cut off a force of three divisions which he had learned were moving past his right. But Wellington was a dangerous opponent not easily "contained." He guessed Soult's plan, and struck instantly and fiercely at Reille in his front. Reille was a good soldier, and he held what both Soult and he believed to be an impregnable position. But no position could be "impregnable" to such soldiers as Wellington had under his command. Picton, with the "Fighting Third," broke through the French left, and shook their line; the 2nd Division turned their right; their front was shattered by the charge of the 7th Division, and Reille's force was swept back in confusion, losing 2000 in killed and wounded, and 3000 prisoners.

Soult found Hill in front of him, not merely with three divisions, but with 10,000 men; and he held a difficult mountain-ridge. But Soult's force was 20,000 strong, and, after some rough fighting, Hill was compelled to fall back. Wellington by this time having shattered Reille, was moving to cut off Soult. He sent Picton, with some cavalry and guns, to turn the French left, while Hill was ordered to menace Soult's rear in the valley of Lanz. Picton came into touch with the French in the Val de Zubiri, and drove their left flank from the hillside

into the valley. The columns, under Foy, coming up the valley from Sauroren to join Soult, were tumbled back, and as they retreated, Wellington struck into the fight from the village itself. The French fought gallantly, but the battle went against them; and Foy, with the fragments of Clausel's divisions, believing himself entirely cut off, sent news of his disaster to Soult, and climbed over the Great Spine into the pass of Urtiaga beyond. His force, still 8000 strong, thus lost touch with the main body, and was practically destroyed; 3000 prisoners, in all, were captured; while hundreds were dispersed in the woods and ravines.

Soult's stroke had failed, and his anxiety now was to escape from the passes. Graham and Hill were both moving to intercept him; Wellington might head him off and block the Maya defile. He commenced his retreat on the night of the 30th; on the 31st Hill was upon his tracks, Wellington was marching through the pass of Velatte, and Alten, with the Light Division, was pushing ahead at speed to cut him off from the plains beyond. Hill overtook the French on the 31st and there was sharp fighting, but Soult's quick-footed regiments struggled clear, and pushed on. Byng, meanwhile, had seized the pass of Maya, capturing a huge convoy of stores and ammunition left there by D'Erlon; Wellington held the hills by which ran the road from San Estevan, where Soult had halted.

Soult's position seemed hopeless. He was in a deep and narrow valley; Byng was at Maya, Graham and Hill were blocking separate roads, and the Light Division was marching at speed to seize the gap at Vera. If they reached it in time Soult must surrender. The British—Wellington himself being present—could see from the hills which looked down on Soult's valley no sign of movement in his camp. Strict orders were given to light no fire, and to prevent straggling. If Soult remained in camp for another hour he was lost. Just then three marauding British soldiers, who had strayed from their columns, stumbled on a French patrol, and were taken into Soult's lines. Before thirty minutes passed, the sharp roll of drums in the French camp told that Soult had learned his peril; his men were falling in, and the columns began to move out of San Estevan towards the only gap left open.

It was still doubtful whether the French could escape. The defile was a mere crevice in the hills; Cole's skirmishers, from the precipitous heights which at points overhung the track, could fire down upon the hurrying columns. It seemed at times as if the whole mass of the French would disperse. But Soult with masterful energy still kept his men together. It was a race betwixt the French and the Light Division. The regiments of that famous division marched with the speed they showed when trying to reach Talavera, but they had no Craufurd

to direct their march. At noon on August 1 they had marched twenty-four miles, and were only a league from Estevan; but Alten, instead of moving direct for that pass, swung to his left and crossed the great hill of Santa Cruz, making for the bridge of Yanzi. The heat was intense, the hill-paths steep. "Many men," says Napier, "died convulsed and frothing at the mouth; others, whose spirit had never before been quelled, leaned on their muskets and muttered in sullen tones that they yielded for the first time."

At sunset, after marching nineteen consecutive hours, and over forty miles of mountain roads, the leading files of the exhausted columns reached the edge of a precipice overlooking the bridge of Yanzi. Beneath them, within easy pistol-shot, the French divisions were crowding to the bridge out of the narrow defile. When the French saw the precipice above them suddenly covered with red-coated soldiers, they broke their ranks. There was a wild rush for the bridge; the cavalry drew their swords and tried to break through their own infantry; the infantry answered with bayonet-thrusts. Some lifted their muskets and fired upward at the British, the wounded held up their hands for quarter. The British on the cliffs above hesitated to fire on that helpless crowd; they shot with averted or doubtful aim. Before the British could find the tracks leading down from the heights, the French were over the

bridge, but their baggage was cut off, with many prisoners.

Clausel, meanwhile, had found his way through the hills, and after nine days of swift, confused movements, and ten bloody actions, Soult was out of the passes. He had failed to break through Wellington's lines, or to relieve either Pampeluna or San Sebastian; he had lost 15,000 men, and he narrowly escaped a still more utter overthrow. "It was," says Napier, "the disobedience of three plundering knaves which deprived one consummate commander of the most splendid success, and saved the other from the most terrible disaster."

CHAPTER XX

SAN SEBASTIAN

"Spain cost me a great deal: but for her I should have been master of Europe."—NAPOLEON.

WELLINGTON was content with blockading Pampeluna, but San Sebastian was a different question. It was a seaport in daily communication with France, a refuge for French privateers, a menace to Wellington's base, a constant interruption to his supplies. And, curiously enough, though England had swept the fleets of France from the sea, no adequate naval assistance was, for long, given to Wellington. There was no sufficient blockade of San Sebastian; a single frigate and a few brigs and cutters were the only ships off that part of the coast. But Wellington could not leave San Sebastian to be a thorn on his flank; he resolved to carry the place by siege, and put Graham, with his division of British troops, and some Spanish and Portuguese, in charge of the business. Jones, in his "Journal of the Siege," says "the capture of the place, with scientific methods and a sufficient train, would have been an easy and certain operation

in eighteen or twenty days, with little loss of life." As a tragical fact the attempt to carry San Sebastian in a hurry spread out the business over sixty days, and cost the British 3500 men and officers.

San Sebastian stands on a flat, curving, sandy peninsula, almost directly under the rugged shoulder of the Pyrenees. As defined on the map, it looks exactly like the head and neck of a gigantic horse thrust out from the shore. From the "forehead" down to the "nose" runs a rocky crest some 400 feet high, named Monte Orgullo; on the summit of this ridge stood the castle. A solid curtain, jutting at its centre into a strong outwork, crossed the neck of the peninsula, with ramparts connecting it with the castle. The town itself, with its narrow streets and solid stone houses, forming a tangle of defences, served as a rambling outpost. The commander, Rey, described as "a great fat man, heavy-bodied and moon-faced," did not wear the look of a dashing and a brilliant soldier. But by virtue of a certain fierce and stubborn courage and of exhaustless resource, he succeeded in holding San Sebastian for sixty days against the British, beat off two desperate assaults, and added a record to the story of sieges in the Peninsula which, in its baleful fame, may well stand beside the tale of Badajos.

Graham's conduct of the siege was marked less by Scottish caution than by a certain impatient

haste which defeated itself. His guns opened on the curtain, and on the eastern wall connecting the curtain with the castle; on July 23 two breaches in the wall were visible, and it was resolved to assault. Wellington, who had learned at Badajos the uncertainty and peril which darkness adds to such an adventure, directed that the attack should be made "in fair daylight." But the dawn came slowly; there was impatience both in the storming columns and their leaders; the signal to advance was given while the night was still black, and 2000 men were flung on the breaches. The attack was rich in gallant—or rather in furious—leadership, but it was leadership which lacked coolness. The storming column had to defile some 300 yards under the eastern wall before the first breach was reached. The leading files halted at what seemed, in the gloom, a gap in the wall, and commenced to fire upon it. It was not the breach; the space betwixt the wall and the river was narrow, and, as the stormers halted, the French, from the parapet above, shot fast and with deadly effect upon them.

Some officers struggled out of the crowd, ran forward to the true breach, and clambered up the broken slope, only to find that it was cut off from the town by a huge gulf, fenced in with a semicircle of flaming houses, and swept, in front, and from either flank, with musketry volleys. Fraser, who led a battalion of the Royal Scots, reached the crest, leaped

into the blackness before him, and perished. But only a fragment of the storming column had followed him to the true breach. The river was rising fast; it would soon wash the foot of the wall; and scourged still with volleys from the ramparts, and threatened with drowning by the brown, swirling waters at their feet, the column fell sullenly back, leaving 600 dead or wounded scattered along the foot of the wall, or mottling with tiny splashes of red the slope of the great breach.

Soult's attempt to break through the defiles of the Pyrenees caused a suspension of the siege, and for thirty days, while Soult and Wellington contended on that rough field of battle, the British were content sullenly to blockade San Sebastian. On August 26, with batteries strengthened, fire was opened afresh, and maintained for three days and nights. On the 30th the breaches were declared to be practicable, and the next day was fixed for the assault. Wellington, exasperated with the failure of the first attempt, issued an order calling for fifty volunteers from each regiment in the 1st, 4th, and Light Divisions—"men who could show other troops how to mount a breach." The three divisions thus appealed to volunteered almost to a man; but the men of the 5th, who had failed in the first assault, were furious with their rivals for the second. Feeling ran so high that it seemed probable the men of the exasperated 5th would fire on the volunteers from the other divisions

if they were allowed to go ahead of them. Leith, who commanded the 5th, insisted that his men should have another chance, and it was arranged that the 750 volunteers should simply be in support.

At the hour fixed on the 31st, the British guns suddenly fell silent; some mines which had been driven against the eastern end of the curtain exploded, and the storming columns were let loose. It was known—or guessed—that the French had mined the sea wall at a point where it hung over the track along which the storming columns must come, and a sergeant, with a dozen privates, ran ahead and leaped on the covered way to cut the fuse. Shaken by that plucky stroke, the French fired the mine prematurely. The explosion slew the gallant sergeant and his comrades, but missed its effect on the British column.

The stormers of the 5th Division swept up the breach without a check, and found themselves on the edge of a gulf from 16 to 30 feet deep, girdled on the farther side by a strong wall, packed thick with French infantry, while deep traverses cut the breach off from the rampart on either flank. The breach, in a word, was a trap—an impassable gulf in front, deep traverses on both sides, and from either flank, and from the front, was poured a deadly hail of bullets. The volunteers from the other divisions had watched the check of the stormers of the 5th, and grew furiously impatient. They were let—or broke—

loose, and, to quote Napier, "went like a whirlwind up the breaches." But no bravery could cross the gulf which had already checked the men of the 5th. Yet for two hours the stormers clung to its edge, whipped with a tempest of French bullets, and died there in hundreds.

There were two other attacks—one at the half bastion of St. John, and another by a column of Portuguese on the farther and smaller breach, reached by fording the river; but none succeeded. Graham watched, almost in despair, the wild scene on the breach; at last some one suggested a device without parallel in the history of besieged places. Fire was opened with fifty heavy guns, over the heads of the stormers, on the parapet of the curtain which commanded both breaches. For half-an-hour the storming parties crouched on the rough slope of the breach, while the tempest of iron swept only a few inches over their heads, shattering the parapet of the curtain and sweeping it from end to end. The fire of the guns exploded a great store of shells and grenades piled continuously along the parapet for scores of yards, and the explosion ran in a scorching blast along the parapet, slaying its defenders as with a whirlwind of flame.

Then the guns ceased; and at the call of their officers the stormers leaped to their feet and raced afresh. The breach itself was still impassable, but there was a gap betwixt one of the traverses and

the outer wall by which a single man could squeeze himself, and through this tiny crevice the stream of stormers broke into San Sebastian. The breach in the bastion of St. John was carried at the same time.

A wild storm was raging amongst the mountain peaks and swept down upon San Sebastian just as the stormers broke through, and the tumult in the streets of the captured city was answered by the tumult in the black skies above. While thunder crashed in the air above them, and the skies were scribbled over with lightning, men fought and slew each other in the streets of San Sebastian. The shameful precedent of Ciudad and Badajos was followed, and the city was not only captured but sacked. The siege cost Wellington in killed and wounded 3800 officers and men, a deadlier cost than almost any of his battles.

When San Sebastian fell, Soult withdrew across the Bidassoa, and the last hold of the French on the Peninsula was broken. Suchet, it was true, was still in Catalonia, but that province for him was a prison rather than a stronghold. Pampeluna held out; but its surrender was only a question of time. Wellington had achieved the task he had taken in hand when he landed at Mondego Bay on August 1, 1808. And never before in history, perhaps, was a task so great achieved by forces so small. Only once during his six campaigns did Wellington have

30,000 British troops under his command. Wellington himself sometimes wondered at his own success, and the scanty force by which it was achieved. "It is strange," he wrote, "that with this little army we are able to keep them in check." "With about 30,000 men in the Peninsula," he wrote again, "we have now for five years given employment to at least 200,000 French." But the whole story of the war exactly verified Wellington's forecast of it.

Soult, as he fell back sullenly into France, knew that Wellington sooner or later would break out of the defiles of the Pyrenees and France herself would be invaded. And he wrote to Paris that "unless he had 50,000 men who had never met the British" he could not answer for the safety of Southern France. Those troops who *had* met the British were so discouraged by the experience that they were no longer to be relied upon.

CHAPTER XXI

IN FRANCE

"I entertain no doubt that, from first to last, Buonaparte sent 600,000 men into Spain, and I know that not more than 100,000 went out in the shape of an army, and with the exception of Suchet's corps, these were without cannon or baggage, or anything to enable them to act as an army."—WELLINGTON.

THE allied Sovereigns and the British Cabinet were now urging Wellington to cross the French border. If his red columns, with the prestige of five successful campaigns playing about their bayonets, broke through the Pyrenees, and made their appearance in the South of France, both the political and the strategic effect must be great. But Wellington looked at the whole situation with the cool eyes of a soldier. Suchet was still in Catalonia with 20,000 veteran troops. He might at any moment undertake some dangerous stroke in Spain, or break through the eastern defiles of the Pyrenees and join Soult. Was it wise to leave a force so dangerous in his rear? Pampeluna, too, had not yet surrendered; the position of the allied Sovereigns themselves was uncertain; Napoleon had shown his unlessened fighting power

in the recent victories at Lutzen and Bautzen; the Congress of Prague was in session, and terms of peace might be accepted which would leave Napoleon free to turn on the British in overwhelming force, and drive them back into Spain, and perhaps to Portugal.

So, for a time, Wellington refused to move. All his ancient and familiar perplexities remained to vex him. His supplies were exhausted. His regiments were without pay, and almost without clothes; the march to Vittoria, and the rough fighting in the Pyrenees had both reduced their numbers and shaken their discipline. They were now encamped on the naked slopes of the Pyrenees in wild weather; and the furious gales, the ceaseless rains, the bitter cold, sorely tried his ill-clad and ill-fed battalions. There was a constant trickle of desertions from the wind-scourged British camps. In a little over three months 1200 such were recorded.

But at last Wellington decided to move. He wrote to Lord Bathurst on September 19: "I think I ought, and will, bend a little to the views of the allies, if it can be done with safety to the army, notwithstanding that I acknowledge I should prefer to turn my attention to Catalonia." It was, in a word, bad strategy—strategy which offended his soldierly instincts—to leave an unvanquished enemy in his rear. Yet, pressed by public opinion, and

looking to its effect on Europe generally, Wellington resolved to invade France. The war in the Peninsula was, after all, only part of a great movement; its rhythm with affairs in Central Europe must be maintained.

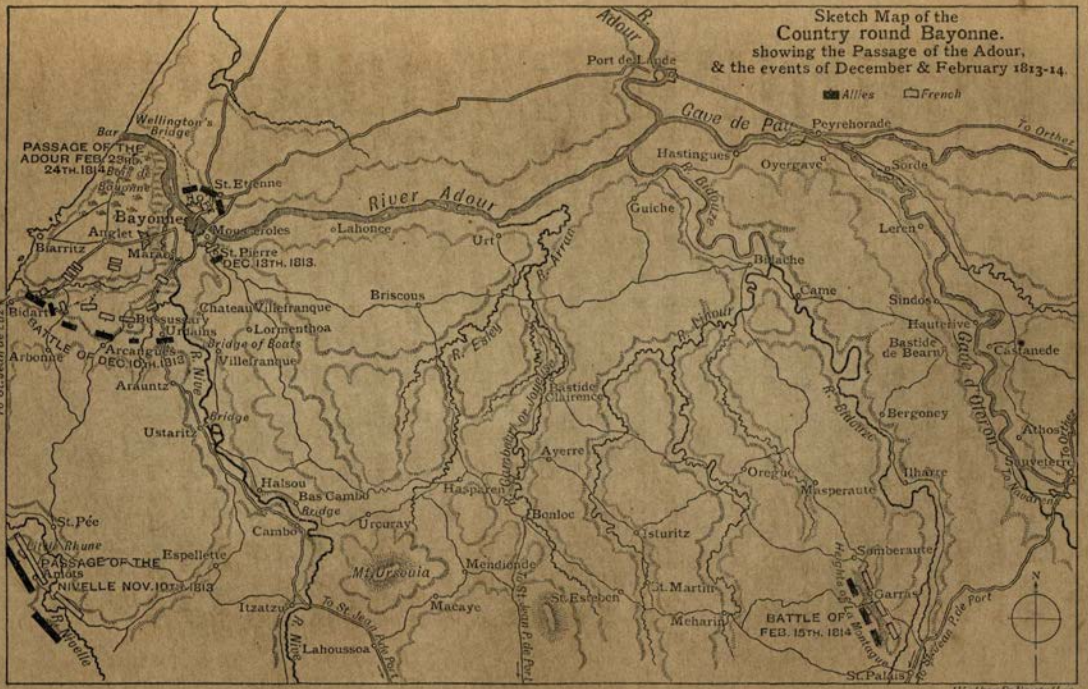
Wellington crossed the Bidassoa on October 7, 1813, the battle of Toulouse was fought on April 10, 1814; and this period of six months—though the field of action was on French soil—in reality forms the last page in the story of Wellington's Peninsular campaigns. The strategy of that final campaign—to say nothing of its marches and combats—is not easily intelligible. Its field was a distracted tangle of almost roadless hills and muddy valleys. There is in it no single and decisive battle. The story is one of marches and countermarches, of surprises and escapes, of desperate combats, betwixt detached columns, in mountain defiles. But the story is well worth telling, for there is perhaps no chapter in the record of either of the rival commanders—Wellington or Soult—which shows finer skill, or higher daring.

Wellington had the best army he ever commanded—an army with which, as he afterwards said, "he could go anywhere and do anything." It had the unbreakable toughness—the edge and hardness—of tempered steel; and like steel, it had been shaped and tempered in flame—the flame of many battles. Soult, too, was in his highest mood of command. He was fighting for a better cause than in Spain.

And he had one quality of a great commander—he was never so formidable as in desperate circumstances. William Napier had an interview with Soult a short time afterwards; and "he gave me the idea," he says, "of a great general of antiquity as much as any man I ever met with. Rough in manner, bold, keen and simple at the same time; not quick, but the most determined grand face I almost ever saw. Black, rather dirty, more from wearing coarse old clothes than from actual dirt . . . his *abord* was fierce and commanding."[1] This was a commander not unfit to cross swords with Wellington. And certainly for swiftness of stroke, for heroic constancy, and for unfailing resource, Soult, in this campaign, rose to great heights. He was fighting not to plunder a nation, but to protect his native land from an invader.

Bayonne, which Soult held as his base and place of arms, may be taken as the apex of a triangle, with a great road running coastward through Saint-Jean-de-Luz to the Bidassoa as one of its sides. The other great road, to Saint-Jean-de-Port, is the twin containing side. A line, forty miles long, drawn from Saint-Jean-de-Luz to Saint-Jean-de-Port forms the base of the triangle, the Bidassoa, for a considerable distance, defining part of this imaginary base. The space within this triangle is congested with the foothills of the Pyrenees. it is punctured with

[1] "Life," p. 229.


Sketch Map of the
Country round Bayonne.
showing the Passage of the Adour,
& the events of December & February 1813-14.
Allies
French
R. Adour
Port de Lande
Cave de Pas
Peyrehorade
To Orthez
Hastingues
Oyergave
Sorde
PASSAGE OF THE ADOUR FEB. 23rd & 24th. 1814
Wellington's Bridge
Bar
Boyle de Baionne
St. Etienne
River Adour
Bayonne
Anglet
Biarritz
Marracq
Mouguerolles
Lahonce
Urt
St. Pierre DEC. 13TH. 1813.
R. Bidouze
Guiche
Leren
Bilaiche
Came
Sindos
Hauterive
Briscous
Chateau Villefranque
Bidart
Ruissuary
Urdains
Lormenthoa
Bridge of Boats
Villefranque
BATTLE OF ARCANGUES DEC. 10th 1813
Arbonne
Arauntz
R. Nive
Bridge
Ustaritz
To St. Jean de Luz
R. Estrigue
R. Arrauga
R. Joyeuse
Bastide Clairence
R. Adour
Bastide de Bearn
Castanede
Gave d'Oleron
R. Bidouze
Bergoney
Athos
Sauveterre
To Navarrenx
Ayerre
Oregue
Masperaute
Ilharre
Halsou
Bas Cambo Bridge
Hasparen
Bonloc
Urcuray
Cambo
St. Pée
R. Rhune
Espellette
PASSAGE OF THE NIVELLE NOV. 10TH. 1813
Mt. Ursouia
Mendionde
Isturitz
Samberaute
Heights of La Montagne
Garris
Itzatzu
To St. Jean Pied de Port
Macaye
St. Esteben
St. Martin
Meharin
BATTLE OF FEB. 15TH. 1814
To Bidarray
R. Nivelle
Lahoussoa
St. Palais
To Mauleon & Pt. Port
N
Walker & Boutall sc.

muddy and impassable valleys. It is almost roadless. Such a district lent itself magnificently to a defensive campaign; and Soult employed the skill of his engineers to multiply natural difficulties. He had a double chain of entrenched camps and earthworks along the whole base of this hilly triangle. Towards the sea the hills sink, the country is more open; and here Soult had multiplied his entrenchments. In the centre of this long chain of fortified hills, frowning above the little town of Vera, rose a stern and rugged peak called La Rhune, the central and natural citadel of Soult's defences. To break through such a line, and invade a country so rugged; to do it in winter time, with every stream in flood, and the rains turning every foot of level ground to mud, was a business which might well tax the genius of even a great captain and the hardihood of the finest soldiery.

Wellington's plan was to storm the Rhune, with all the hilly defences girdling it, and at the same time to thrust his left across the Bidassoa, at its very mouth, thus breaking through Soult's centre, and crumpling up his right wing. If he succeeded he would hold all the country from Sarre to the sea, and the Rhune would be a formidable citadel no longer guarding, but threatening, France. The plan of crossing the Bidassoa at its mouth was of singular audacity; for the current is swift, the tide rises and falls sixteen feet, and Clausel, with

a force of 15,000 men, kept watch from the point where the Bidassoa enters the sea up to the great Rhune. Foy, with an equal force, guarded Pied-de-Port, on Soult's left; and Hill, who confronted Foy, was to distract Soult's attention by a threatening movement. Then — and simultaneously — the 4th and 9th Divisions, with Giron's Spaniards, would storm La Rhune, while the 1st and 5th Divisions, a force in all of 15,000 men, crossed the Bidassoa near its mouth, by some old and forgotten fords, of whose existence Wellington had learned from the fishermen on the coast.

All through the night of October 6 furious rains were beating on the slopes of the mountains, and on the broad, sliding flood of the Bidassoa; but, in spite of tempest and rain, the British troops had come up through the darkness, and were in their assigned positions. As the dawn, stormy and grey, showed in the east, seven British columns, along a line of five miles, broke from their concealment and were struggling by the fords, or pushing their way with musket and bayonet over the bridges, across the Bidassoa. Far to the left the men of the 5th Division had to cross the river by uncertain fords, close to its mouth, and where it was a swiftly sliding stream nearly half a mile broad. The water rose to their arm-pits; many were swept away. The French, on the farther bank, taken by surprise, opened an angry but ineffective musketry fire on

the red, half-drowned columns struggling through the brown waters towards them. But the men of the 5th were quickly across; the columns of the 1st Division followed, the French in their front were swept aside, and a rocket streaming up in the sky, still black with night and with clouds, told the other columns, far up the stream, that the French right was turned. The 1st and 5th brought up their left shoulder as soon as they were across. and pushed along the farther bank of the river, taking the other bridges in reverse.

Meanwhile the Light Division had broken through the pass of Vera, were across the river, and assailing the great Rhune. The hill-slopes running down from it on every face were gapped with trenches, and bristled with tiny star-shaped forts. The Bayonette was the most formidable ridge, and the fort which stood on its crest was of great strength. But up the great mountain stairs towards the Bayonette the men of the Light Division raced, the earthworks were stormed, and the trenches crossed, without a halt. The Rifles were leading when, breathless from the steep climb, the column broke into the open space in front of the great star-fort on the summit of the ridge; and the French, missing the familiar and dreaded red—the uniform of the Rifles was dark green—mistook their assailants for Portuguese. They leaped from their entrenchments, ran upon them fiercely, and drove

them back over the edge of the descent. At that moment the leading files of the 52nd, under Colborne, came up; they broke into a cheerful shout as they caught sight of the broken Rifles and the charging French; and their shout—still more the sight of their red uniforms—stopped the sally. The French went back at the double to their fort, the 52nd following so quickly that their leading files entered the fort with them, while the rear of the eager column swept round it on either side, and it was carried almost at a breath.

Colborne himself had some remarkable adventures in this mountain fighting. Riding across the flank of the hills, with one of his staff and half-a-dozen Rifles, he stumbled on a French detachment of 300 men, with a mountain battery. Colborne's little group might have been instantly shot, or captured; but Colborne, without a moment's hesitation, sternly called on the Frenchmen to "surrender." They hesitated, looked round for a moment, and handled their arms. Where was the British column? But that stern face and commanding voice had a magical authority, and the 300 Frenchmen, with their guns, actually surrendered to less than a dozen British Rifles, Colborne keeping their commander in conversation until his column came up.

When night fell, the French had been driven from the slopes of the great Rhune, but they were

still clinging to its summit, on which Clausel had now eight regiments concentrated; but the next day, when the British columns began to move along the flank of the great hill, Clausel hurriedly abandoned it, and fell back to what is known as the smaller Rhune. Napier says that "the crossing of the Bidassoa was a general's and not a soldier's battle," and certainly the brain of a great commander was felt in every detail of the flight, and the results were brilliant. The British had crossed what was regarded as an impassable river in the face of an army; they had carried in little more than five hours a range of mountains, stretching for miles, which Soult had toiled for a whole month to cover with defences.

The truth is that both Wellington and his troops had mastered the art of mountain fighting.

"Most people," Wellington wrote, just at this time, to Lord de Ros, "consider that the carrying on of military operations in a mountainous country like the Pyrenees presents much greater difficulty than the plain. At first, no doubt, this is the case; but when once you become accustomed to it, and acquainted with the general features of the country, I consider it easier to direct the movement of troops in mountains than in the plain country."

But what an eye for "country," what a genius for co-ordinating in the recesses of his brain the whole physiognomy of a vast mountain range, with its valleys and peaks, and what a clear mental picture of the movements and positions of his

own forces, and of those of his enemy, a commander must possess who finds the conduct of a campaign in the Pyrenees, or on its foothills, "easier" than a campaign in level country!

Some of the incidents in the fighting on the Nivelle are unsurpassed in audacity on the part of the British. The dash on the smaller Rhune was a surprise for the French, and most of the defences were carried with a rush. On the summit of the ridge stood a great star-shaped redoubt, too strong to be carried by musketry fire alone. An order—it turned out later to be a mistaken order—to attack reached Colborne, and twice the line of the 52nd swept up the naked slope in the teeth of a dreadful fire, and twice it was driven back. "There was I," said Colborne, afterwards, "on the top of that hill, heading the 52nd and exposed to the most murderous fire. I was never in such peril in my whole life." Colborne, however, acted on the theory that the most daring plan was the safest. He pushed his horse, through a hail of bullets, close up to the wall of the redoubt, waved his handkerchief, and called out loudly to the French leader on the other side of the wall: "What nonsense this is, attempting to hold out. You see you are surrounded on every side; there are the Spaniards on the left. You had better surrender at once."

The French had a deep and natural horror of

falling into Spanish hands, and they hesitated. Their officer thought Colborne was sinning against military etiquette by appealing to his men, and grew furious. "That is all nonsense," shouted Colborne. "You must surrender." The French still hesitated, but finally Colborne was asked inside the fort to arrange terms.

The French surrendered, and the 52nd formed in double line, and gave them the honours of war as they marched out. "Next morning," says Colborne, "the returns from the 52nd were 200 killed and wounded. 'How is that?' I said to the adjutant; 'I see before me the very men returned as wounded?'" The wounds were real enough; but one hundred men who counted their wounds only slight had refused to go to the rear, and fell in with the regiment. They would not lose the chance of such good fighting.

In the pause which followed the fight for the Nivelle, and while Soult, in the lines round Bayonne, was busy digging himself into what he hoped would be safety, Wellington despatched all his Spanish troops, except a single division—that of Morillo—back to Spain, thus deliberately reducing his force by 20,000 men. The Spaniards, with a thousand cruel memories of French outrages in Spain in their very blood, could not be kept from plundering now they were on French soil; and Wellington was too wise a captain to keep physical,

at the cost of moral, force. "If I had 20,000 men, paid and fed," he wrote to Lord Bathurst, "I should have Bayonne. If I had 40,000, I do not know where I should stop. Now I have both the 20,000 and the 40,000, . . . but if they plunder they will ruin all." "I have lost," he wrote a little later, "20,000 men in this campaign. It was not that General Morillo, or anybody else, might plunder the French peasantry; and I distinctly declare that I will not suffer it while I command." Wellington had seen, in Spain, for how much a guerilla warfare counted, and he dreaded seeing the consuming flame of such a warfare kindled against himself in France. "Maintain the strictest discipline," he charged Freyre. "Without it we are lost."

Soult, on his part, saw the advantage a guerilla warfare would be to him, and he used every art to arouse it. He despatched General Harispe, himself a Basque, and a soldier of great energy, to kindle a guerilla warfare in the Basque mountains. He called upon the peasantry everywhere to "rise and exterminate the insolent invaders who had dared to defile the sacred soil of France by the touch of their feet." But Wellington used both severity and kindness as weapons against such a rising. When the Basque rising threatened to spread he issued a manifesto, calling upon the peasantry to choose betwixt war and peace. If

they murdered his sentinels and cut off his outposts he declared he "would treat them as the French generals treated the insurgents in Spain; he would burn their villages and put those found in arms to death." On the other hand, he paid for everything brought into his camps. He urged the Mayors of the communes to retain their office, and authorised them to seize and, if necessary, to shoot, any marauding soldiers. In one instance, of two marauding soldiers, one was shot dead by the villagers, the other wounded. On being taken into the British lines Wellington promptly hanged the wounded man, and rewarded the villagers.

Wellington's policy had wonderful results. "It does us more harm," wrote a French officer, "than ten battles. Every peasant wishes to be under his protection." Soult himself complained that the French peasantry "appeared more disposed to favour the invaders than to second the army. . . . I shall not be surprised," he added, "to find in a short time these peasants taking up arms against us." Supplies, in fact, were carried into Wellington's lines, in French carts, more freely than into those of Soult.

Wellington was still aiming at Bayonne; but as he advanced the triangle of hills betwixt the two great paved roads which formed its sides narrowed; and Wellington, swinging suddenly to the right, crossed the Nive at Cambo, thus cutting off Saint-

Jean-Pied-de-Port. Hill, with his columns, then moved on to the Adour, while Soult fell back into Bayonne. But he held a central position. The British forces, in perilously unrelated fragments, were scattered along a wide crescent. Hill, beyond the Nive, was parted by that river from Beresford; Wellington's left, under Hope, was far off in the hills round Arcangues; and Soult was too good a soldier to miss the opportunity thus offered.

On November 10 he made a vehement thrust at Hope, whose brigades were scattered along a wide front. But Hope's divisions, the 5th and Light—with some Portuguese brigades—were stubborn fighters, and they held their position until late in the day, when the 3rd, 4th, and 7th, with the Guards from Saint-Jean-de-Luz, came splashing along the muddy roads to their help. Soult then fell back; but he was in a fighting mood, and dangerous in resource. His stroke at Wellington's right had failed; but on the very night of his failure his columns were marching at speed through Bayonne, and on the morning of the 9th they fell with fury on Hill, in his isolated position at St. Pierre betwixt the Nive and the Adour.

Wellington had guessed Soult's plan, and sent the 4th and 6th Divisions, with part of the 3rd, marching at speed to reinforce Hill; but that general had fought his battle, and won it, before they arrived.

The fight at St. Pierre is memorable even in

the story of those hard-fighting days as a tale of desperate courage. Hill held a front of two miles; his centre, a rough crescent-shaped ridge, was parted from his left, held by Pringle's brigades, by a chain of ponds. Abbé was distinguished even among Soult's war-hardened generals for his fire in battle, and he led the first French column in their attack on the British centre with such dash that the ridge was reached and won almost at a stroke. But the 92nd was in reserve, and it in turn charged Abbé's column; and it came on with such stern courage that the Frenchmen were driven, broken and disordered, down the slope. The undaunted Abbé then brought up his second column through the flame of Ross's guns, and not even the 92nd could stop their advance. Hill's centre was pierced.

The fight, on the British side, had at this stage one long-remembered and unhappy feature. In the very crisis of the struggle two British regiments of great fame—the 71st and the 3rd—fell back. The colonel of each was a man with a good fighting record; but the strain of a contest so desperate either shook the nerves, or clouded the judgment, of these officers, and they took their regiments out of the fight. Hill, in person, came up. It was one of the two occasions on which he was heard to swear. Both of the disgusted regiments obeyed with a cheer the order to "right-about-face," and went back into the fighting line in a very wrathful mood.

The French reserves were advancing on the centre, and the 92nd was pushed forward to meet them. It was a Highland regiment, and Cameron, its colonel, knew how to appeal to the Highland temperament. He brought the 92nd down the road in perfect martial array, with dancing plumes and flying colours, his pipers filling the air with the wild strains of the pibroch. The gallant array of the 92nd, as it advanced, the sound of the shrilling pipes, quickened the whole British front; on every side the skirmishers ran forward. The great French column in front was coming on bravely enough, but its commander looked long and anxiously at the Highlanders as they came on steadily with their wind-blown plumes and far-stretching line of bayonets. It was a discouraging sight. Then the Frenchman suddenly threw up his hand, and shouted an order; his column halted, faced about, and marched off. Soult's leap on St. Pierre had failed. With less than 14,000 men and 14 guns Hill had wrecked the assault of 35,000 men with 22 guns. It was the strain of lion-like courage in himself, linked to the obstinate valour of his regiments, that won the fight.

The best heads in the British army, it may be added, could hardly forgive, at this stage, the daring of Wellington's strategy. Of St. Pierre, Colborne says: "Wellington committed a great error. Hill's division was quite isolated. Soult passed the bridge and attacked it with his whole army; yet

such was the goodness of the British troops, he was repulsed." But the fighting quality of his troops was exactly the quality on which Wellington counted. Colborne goes on to tell how "Soult said himself, afterwards, 'Well, if one division of your troops can stand against seventy or eighty thousand of ours, there's no more to be said; but it is an error.' Another French officer said to me, 'Were not those troops of ours fine men? Yet your little hump-backed soldiers repulsed them.' Soult's were extremely fine men."

After the fight at St. Pierre both armies went into winter quarters, for the short days were stormy, the rain was incessant, the long nights were bitter with cold. Till February 14 the two armies confronted each other. Soult was toiling with fierce energy to strengthen his position round Bayonne. There were occasional skirmishes; but, on the whole, the French and British outposts fell, with the coolness of veterans, into amusingly friendly relations with each other. They were prepared to fight each other to the death when fighting was necessary, but meanwhile there was no reason why good soldiers should not make life as pleasant as possible to each other. The outlying sentries would chat together, and exchange friendly offices. When a particular post was needed, one sentinel would warn the other that he must retire; he would often assist him to fasten his knapsack on his back, and send him off with a

friendly smack. Sometimes the men at the outposts —sometimes even the officers—would lunch together in picnic fashion.

It was not strict soldiership, but it was friendly human nature. On one occasion Wellington wished, for the purpose of observation, to reach the summit of a hill held by a French outpost, and he ordered his escort, a detachment of Rifles, to drive them off. The Rifles advanced till Wellington, thinking they were getting too close, gave the order to "fire." One of the Rifles shouted, "No firing," and, holding the butt of his rifle towards the French, he tapped it in a peculiar way. It was an agreed signal; it meant "we must have the hill for a short time." The French would have answered shot with shot; but they obeyed that friendly signal, and fell quietly back. "So well," says Napier, "did these veterans understand war and its proprieties."

Napoleon, during these months, under the stress of disaster in the centre of Europe, drew heavily on Soult's army, until its fighting force shrunk to 40,000. Ferdinand VII. had been for years a prisoner in France; but the state of affairs now gave even that ignoble and forgotten pawn some political value, and Napoleon offered to send him back to Spain if Suchet's force in Catalonia were allowed to march without opposition to France. He would buy a good army corps, that is, at the

price of a bad king. But the Spanish Cortes had sufficient wisdom to refuse the offer.

When operations began on February 14, Wellington's superiority in force enabled him to strike simultaneously at two widely distant points. His right, under Hill, was pushed forward towards Bayonne, and Soult drew his forces together at Orthes, on the right bank of the Pau. Meanwhile, far to the left, Wellington was preparing to force, with Hope's divisions, a passage across the Adour, betwixt Bayonne and the sea. It was an audacious conception. The mouth of the Adour is really an estuary, with marshy shores, scourged by strong tides, and open to all the gales that blow in from the Bay of Biscay. To carry an army, with its guns, across such a stream, with Soult to watch, and bar, the passage might well seem an impossible task.

But Wellington planned the adventure with matchless skill. A squadron, under Admiral Penrose, was to co-operate in the attempt; but the wild weather kept the British ships, day after day, in the offing, until Hope, a gallant soldier, determined to wait no longer. He had 28,000 men and 20 guns; and on the night of February 22 he pushed his first division along the muddy roads towards the Adour, drove off the French outposts, and began to put together with speed a temporary bridge of pontoons and rafts. A

detachment of the Guards was rowed in pontoons across, and held the farther bank while the bridge was being constructed.

On the 24th the boats of the squadron tried to come in to Hope's aid. The breakers were high; all the buoys had been removed by the French; it was impossible to see the true channel. But British seamen are familiar with risks. The leading boat came gallantly on, plunged into the tumult of breakers on the bar, and sank in the furious sea. The second boat followed, with happier fate; but the tide, which has the fury of a mill-race, had turned, and no other boats could come through. At flood-tide, however, they were swaying like a flock of sea-birds outside the bar. The leading boat came on steadily, was caught by a gigantic wave, and capsized. The other boats, with ready skill, went about, and hung, in the wild sea, off the mouth of the river. One keen-eyed officer caught a glimpse of what he thought was the true channel, and, risking his life on the glimpse, came through, boat after boat following, with slanting masts and dripping crews; but eight boats were lost.

On the 24th the infantry columns were defiling over the swaying, slender, thread-like bridge; but it took two days more to complete a bridge sufficient to carry artillery and baggage. It was constructed of twenty-six great boats, moored head

and stern, at regular intervals, from each other. They were held together by thick cables, stretched from bank to bank, sufficiently slack to yield to the spring tide which rose 14 feet. The boom consisted of a double line of masts, connected with chains and cables, so as to form a succession of squares. "The construction of this great bridge," says Napier, "must always rank among the prodigies of war." When it was completed, Wellington held Bayonne, betwixt his right wing and his left, like a nut in the jaws of a pair of nut-crackers.

CHAPTER XXII

ORTHES AND TOULOUSE

"What Alexander's Macedonians were at Arbela, Hannibal's Africans at Cannæ, Cæsar's Romans at Pharsalia, Napoleon's Guards at Austerlitz, such were Wellington's British soldiers at this period. The same men who had fought at Vimiero and Talavera contended at Orthes and Toulouse; and six years of uninterrupted success had engrafted on their natural strength and fierceness a confidence which rendered them invincible."—NAPIER.

ON the very day after the Adour was crossed Soult fought a gallant and well-nigh successful —but quite useless—battle at Orthes. His position was on a crescent of flat-topped hills, with Orthes itself on the left tip of the crescent; his right, under Reille, occupied a steep hill behind the village of Saint Boës, while D'Erlon was posted in the centre where his front was covered by a far-stretching marsh, which filled the whole space betwixt the two horns of the crescent.

Wellington, from an ancient Roman camp on a hill opposite Soult's centre, searched long and with stern eyes the French position. It was difficult to attack, and Soult had disposed his forces with fine skill. It was not easy to discover a vulnerable point.

At last he decided on his plan. Beresford, with

the 4th and 7th Divisions, was to turn Soult's right at Saint Boës, while the 3rd and 6th, under Clinton, advanced along the high-road which climbed the ridge leading to the French left centre.

The 4th carried the village of Saint Boës itself, but it lay under the fire of the hill on which the French stood, and this could be approached only along a ridge so narrow that the column had no room to deploy. Soult had grouped his guns so that they swept the ridge through its whole length, while long lines of infantry on either side scourged it with a bitter cross-fire. The British regiments came up again and again with splendid daring, but Ross, who commanded the attack — himself the most stubborn of fighters—found he was only thrusting the heads of his columns into a trap of flame, and each assault was repelled with dreadful loss. The attempt on the other extremity of the French line failed too; and as Soult saw the British columns recoiling in disorder from both extremities of his position, he believed the victory was his. "At last I have him!" he cried. His terrible opponent, he imagined, was at last overthrown.

But Wellington was a commander of exhaustless resource, and he knew he had troops capable of any achievement. He resolved to send the 52nd across the marsh on Soult's centre. Colborne tells how Wellington was standing, dismounted, on a knoll, with Lord Fitzroy Somerset: "When I rode below, he called

out, 'Hullo, Colborne, ride on and see if the artillery can pass through,' pointing to the marsh." Colborne rode down to the marsh and galloped back. "Yes," he reported, "anything can pass." "Well, then," said Wellington, "make haste, take your regiment on, and deploy to the plain. I leave it to your disposition."

The 52nd marched down to the marsh, and through the marsh, as if on parade. "We were up to our knees every step in the bog," says George Napier, "the enemy pouring a heavy fire upon us from above; yet I never saw our fellows behave more steadily or more gallantly." Soult ought to have seen that deadly thrust being made at his centre; but he believed the marsh to be uncrossable; he was dreaming of pursuing Wellington, and so avenging many defeats. But the veterans of the Light Division — soldiers, says Napier, "who had never yet met their match in the field"—forced their difficult and perilous way across the marsh; they fell into line on the slope before them, and with shouts, and rolling volleys, broke through between Foy and Taupin.

The fatal wound made by the 52nd in Soult's front paralysed his wings. The 4th forced their way, at last, across the fatal ridge on his left; the 6th carried the position held by the French right, and Soult fell back in retreat. But Hill, by this time, had got across the river, fording it above the bridge,

with fine daring; and, with a force of 14,000 good soldiers, he held the road to Pau. Soult was pushing along a ridge parallel with the road to St. Sever, and along the corresponding ridge came Hill's columns. It was a race to reach the bridge at Salespice. The pace quickened, and Soult's columns began to disintegrate. Many broke from the ranks, and made across the fields to the river, and Somerset's Hussars rode fiercely in pursuit of them. The two columns, by this time, had broken into a run, but Soult gained the bridge, crossed it, broke it down, and so checked the pursuit.

Wellington lost in that fight more than 2500 killed and wounded, but Soult, from his army of 40,000, suffered a loss of at least 7000 killed and wounded, captured, or dispersed. At Orthes, for the third time in his career, Wellington was struck by a bullet. He had been hit before, once in India, at Sultan-pettah; once in Spain, at Salamanca; and now again in France, at Orthes. He was standing amongst his staff when a Portuguese soldier limped by and shouted as he passed that he was "*ofendido*" —wounded. The staff, and Wellington himself, were laughing at the quaint expression, when a shot struck the hilt of Wellington's sword, and the blow was so great that it threw him to the ground. He sprang to his feet immediately, and laughed afresh, saying, "I am *ofendido* this time." But the steel hilt

of his sword averted what might well have been a mortal wound.

As the 52nd crossed the marsh, Lord March—who had been on Wellington's staff, but, having been promoted to a captaincy in the 52nd, had joined that regiment in the battle—was shot through the body, and was carried to a house in Orthes and lay there. Every one believed him to be dying. March was universally beloved; and, says George Napier,

"about the middle of the night, as Dr. Hare was sitting dozing in a chair opposite Lord March's bed, who had fallen asleep, the door of the room gently opened, and a figure in a white cloak and military hat walked up to the bed, drew the curtains quietly aside, looked steadily for a few seconds on the pale countenance before him, then leaned over and pressed his lips on the forehead of Lord March, heaved a deep sigh, and turned to leave the room, when the doctor, who had anxiously watched every movement, beheld the countenance of Wellington, his cheeks wet with tears."

He had ridden many a mile that night, alone, to see his favourite boyish soldier, the son of his dearest friend.

Soult fell back along the course of the Adour to Tarbes, and this left open the road to Bordeaux, a city with a strong Royalist leaven. The political effect of seizing it would be great, and Beresford, with two divisions, was despatched for that purpose. He entered Bordeaux without firing a shot, and was welcomed with enthusiasm, the tricolour disappearing from its walls and the white cockade taking its

place on the caps of the citizens as his columns marched in. The Mayor, indeed, proclaimed Louis XVIII. king; the Duc d'Angoulême made his appearance on the scene, and promptly appealed to Wellington for a supply of cash. Wellington believed that to declare for the old dynasty would be wise policy, for the Bourbons had ancient and historic relations with France, and had many adherents. But the allied Sovereigns, when they crossed the Rhine, declared their sole object was "to secure peace to Europe." They were not fighting in the interests of a dynasty, and would not commit themselves to a Bourbon restoration; and Wellington loyally stood by that declaration. He wrote to the Duc d'Angoulême, "I cannot allow the honour and character of the allied Sovereigns or my own to be doubted even for a moment. . . . It is not in my power under existing circumstances to make your Royal Highness the advance of money you require."

Soult had one quality of a great general; he was most formidable when circumstances seemed most desperate; and thinking that Beresford's march to Bordeaux had dangerously reduced Wellington's force, he moved at speed on Conchez, threatening Hill. But Wellington was as vigilant as Soult was daring, and promptly brought up two divisions to Hill's help. Soult was pushed back to Toulouse with sharp clash of battle, and on March 24 he

entered that city, destroying every bridge behind him.

Toulouse was the chief military arsenal in the south of France, a great city, with a population of 50,000. Soult knew Toulouse and its neighbourhood with the familiarity of a native, and it offered him an ideal position for meeting Wellington's stroke. Looked at on the map, the city exactly resembles in shape a crown, the semicircular sweep of the Garonne defining the "skull" on which the crown is placed. Within the "skull," filling up the whole space from river bank to river bank, is the Faubourg Saint Cyprien, defended by a massive brick wall, centuries old, outside which, as a shield, Soult had constructed a formidable zone of earthworks. Outside the "crown," and following its curve, runs the Great Canal, entering the Garonne below Saint Cyprien, and thus forming a vast wet-ditch for the city.

Strong as were the defences of the city, Soult would not confine his army within their zone, as this would deprive it of all power of movement. Beyond the canal, and parallel with it, runs a range of hills called Mont Rave, and on this Soult drew up his army. The southern extremity of Mont Rave was crowned by a great work, the Sypière redoubt; the northern plateau was guarded by a still greater work, the Calvinet redoubt. A narrow plain—a mere ribbon of marsh—stretched betwixt the foot of Mont

Rave and the Ers River. Wellington himself, in after years, said, "I never saw an army so strongly posted as the French at the battle of Toulouse. There ought to have been an accurate plan and description of the whole affair as a matter of professional science."

Wellington began operations against Saint Cyprien, but found that an attack on that front was hopeless. He then pushed Beresford, with three divisions and some cavalry brigades—a force of 18,000 men—across the Garonne by a temporary bridge; but he had scarcely done this when the river, swollen with rains and with the melted snows from the Pyrenees, suddenly rose and swept away the bridge, and from April 4 to April 8 Beresford's divisions lay isolated and exposed to the attack of Soult's whole force. The spectacle of the dislocated wing of his opponent's army, with an impassable river behind it, and beyond reach of help, might have tempted a duller general than Soult; it might have thrown a commander without Wellington's iron coolness into a fever of alarm. But Soult had the defects of his qualities. He could not easily and quickly change his plans. He was prepared to fight a defensive battle, and he lay rooted in his entrenchments, and allowed a great chance to slip. Wellington accepted the situation with iron serenity. "In for a penny in for a pound" was his summary of the position. "I used to go over in a boat," he told Lord Ellesmere, "and put a good face upon it, and attack Soult's piquets

every morning." If Beresford were attacked he trusted to the stubborn fighting quality of his brigades for their salvation. His officers, it may be added, were more anxious than Wellington himself.

"Why Soult allowed Beresford to remain unmolested for three days, which it took to make a new bridge, I," says George Napier, "cannot conceive. All his generals begged and prayed him to attack and, as they said, 'annihilate this small force.' But he would not run the risk, and (as I have understood from many French officers) said, 'You do not know what stuff two British divisions are made of; they would not be conquered as long as there was a man of them left to stand, and I cannot afford to lose men now.'"

This was the occasion, it may be added, on which, as Wellington used to tell the story, his nose saved his life. He was crossing the river to Beresford's quarters in a tiny boat, with a couple of officers, as dawn was breaking. The light was uncertain, and a sentinel, an Irishman, covered the boat with his musket and challenged. As it happened, no one in the boat remembered the countersign; but suddenly the sentinel brought his musket to the salute, saying, "God bless your crooked nose; I would sooner see it than tin thousand men."

On the 8th the river sank, the bridge was restored, and Wellington's army was once more united; and on the 10th he fought the battle which closed the campaign in the Peninsula—in some respects the most stubborn and perilous of his many fights.

Hill, with two divisions, menaced Saint Cyprien.

Picton, with the "Fighting Third" and the Light Divisions, was to make a feigned attack on the Jubien bridge, across the canal. Both positions were impregnable until the northern defences of the city were shaken or carried; and neither attack was to be pushed home; they were designed to engage the attention of the French while the real attack was made on another front. Hill, with characteristic loyalty, carried out his instructions, and simply kept the French in Saint Cyprien on the alert. Picton, in an equally characteristic fashion, took fire when the muskets began to speak, and made a real and very energetic attempt to carry the bridge. His men, as obstinate as their general, tried to carry the great wall that barred their approach by climbing up on each other's shoulders; nor could they be drawn back till some 500 had fallen.

The assault by which Wellington hoped to carry the city was in charge of Beresford, and was as desperate a venture as any of the whole war. With the 4th and 6th Divisions, and three batteries of guns, Beresford had to push past the whole front of Mont Rave, a distance of two miles, with the river Ers on his left, till he reached the southern end of the ridge. He was then to form front and storm the Sypière redoubt. Freyre had, in almost peremptory accents, demanded that his Spaniards should be given a leading part in the

battle, and his divisions, 9000 strong, were to attack and carry the northern end of the ridge at the moment Beresford's regiments assaulted on the southern part.

Freyre had not the cool judgment of a great soldier; he could not wait while Beresford's columns were slowly toiling on their perilous way through the mud to reach the point they were to attack; and he took forward his Spaniards in two lines, gallantly enough, right up the hill, but half-an-hour too soon. The Spaniards swept up, without a check, almost to the crest, but were met and flung roughly, and with great slaughter, down the slope. Colborne tells how, standing at the bottom of the hill, he watched the attack of the Spaniards, and the sudden counter-stroke of the French; and then saw the Spaniards "go running down as hard as they could." Says Colborne, "I ran as hard as I could to the 52nd. All the officers, seeing the Spaniards flying, called out 'Stop them! Stop them! Do not let them go.' But I called out, 'Yes, let them go, and clear our front.' So we let them go, and our van was left clear." . . . Wellington, who watched the flying Spaniards, offered the dry comment that he "doubted whether the Pyrenees themselves would stop them, they ran so fast." Freyre, however, who had at least the quality of courage, rallied his Spaniards and took them again up the slope, only to be once more flung back,

and Wellington had to check the pursuing French with his reserve artillery and with the fire of the Light Division.

Meanwhile Beresford's divisions were plodding on their road, and seldom have soldiers of any nation, on any battlefield, attempted a more perilous feat. An impassable river was on their left; the road was a stretch of viscid mud, gapped with watercourses. Beresford's force numbered 13,000 men, but at every step the number dwindled beneath the fire most dreaded of soldiers—a deadly flank fire—from the hill above them. Soult had by this time brought up reinforcements from Saint Cyprien to strengthen his lines at Mont Rave; he had now 15,000 men looking down on Beresford's long drawn-out columns beneath, splashing their slow way through the mud, and without artillery, for Beresford had left his guns behind in the impossibility of dragging them through the mud.

Soult certainly had a great opportunity. Why did he not strike at the flank of Beresford's column? If, say Hill, or Picton, had held the ridge with his divisions, and had seen a French column of half his strength, and without guns, defiling slowly over muddy roads for two miles along his front, it is easy to guess what would have befallen that unhappy column. It would have been shattered to fragments. Why did Wellington take the strange risk of Beresford's march? He was once more assessing with

cool judgment the personal elements in the equation. He trusted to the fighting quality of his men; and he knew that Soult had the defect of his qualities. Having rooted himself in his entrenchments along the whole summit, and planned for a defensive fight, he would not change his plan of battle.

Beresford's column plodded doggedly on; it reached the southern extremity of the ridge, swung into line, and commenced to mount the slope. Then, at last, came Soult's counter-attack. Over the ridge and down the ridge, with beat of drums, Taupin's division came at the quick step, its skirmishers running before it, squadrons of cavalry on either flank. At that spectacle Beresford's mud-splashed and foot-weary regiments grew cheerful. Their files closed up. Their skirmishers ran out, and shot coolly and fast into the advancing mass. The two foremost British regiments, as it happened, were Highlanders, the 79th and 42nd. They halted, fired two rolling, far-heard volleys, and then to the scream of their bagpipes, and with one fierce Gaelic shout, they charged. The French crumbled under that rush; Taupin himself fell, shot. The French horse, wheeling to charge the British infantry, were shattered by deadly volleys, and the British swept, without check, to the summit of the hill, their skirmishers hanging on the flanks of the broken French as they raced down the reverse slope.

Beresford halted on the crest until his guns came

up, and then proceeded to sweep the ridge northwards. The great Calvinet redoubt, taken in flank, was carried by the 42nd; but Harispe commanded that part of the French position. He was himself a Biscayan, and Napier says "it was always observed that the fighting was most energetic where he commanded." He launched a fierce counter-attack on the 42nd, and that regiment, stubbornly fighting, was driven out for a moment with dreadful loss. Anton, who fought in the ranks of that regiment, describes the scene, as the wrathful fragments of the 42nd pulled themselves together:

"Two officers and about sixty of inferior rank were all that now remained without a wound of the right wing of the regiment that entered the field in the morning. The flag was hanging in tatters, and stained with the blood of those who had fallen over it. The standard, cut in two, had been successively placed in the hands of three officers, who fell as we advanced; it was now borne by a sergeant, while the few remaining soldiers who rallied around it, defiled with mire, sweat, smoke, and blood, stood ready to oppose with the bayonet the advancing column, the front files of which were pouring in destructive showers of musketry on us."

But the 11th and 91st Regiments came up; the British ran in on the French with great fury, Harispe himself fell; the British attacked again in yet sterner mood, and Soult, finding it impossible to hold the ridge against the dreadful volleys of the British, fell back, recrossed the Languedoc Canal, and took refuge in Toulouse. On the night of the 11th he abandoned the city, with his hospitals and

magazines, and on the 12th Wellington, with his troops, marched into it in triumph. As his troops came through the streets they found a number of citizens occupied in placing a rope round the neck of the statue of Napoleon, which stood on the pediment of one of the public buildings. An eager crowd "tailed on" to the rope, and the great statue, yielding to the strain of so many French hands, gave way and fell in fragments on the pavement. The incident, in a sense, was a parable.

An hour afterwards two staff officers rode in from Paris with the news that Napoleon had abdicated, and the war had ended. The stupidity of some nameless official had detained them on the road, and that delay cost the lives of all the brave men who died on the rough slopes of Mount Rave on November 10.

Wellington, as was inevitable, had keen critics in his own army; and some of the best heads in it were very severe on the general plan on which Toulouse was fought. Colborne describes it as "the worst arranged battle that could be, nothing but mistakes. . . . I think the Duke almost deserved to have been beaten." William Napier criticises the conduct of the fight in equally bitter fashion. The fact is that Soult held a position that lent itself to defence in a supreme degree. Wellington had to attack under conditions which left him over-matched in artillery; his cavalry, as a fighting force, was

counted out; adequately to threaten the city he had to distribute his force so that one-third of it was separated by a great river from the rest. Soult's whole defence, in brief, was arranged so as to compel that perilous march of the attacking column between Mont Rave and the river Ers. He calculated that Wellington would hardly take that risk; or if he did, that his attacking column would be destroyed. That expectation was wrecked when Beresford's column faced front and destroyed Taupin's counter-attack with its deadly volleys.

CHAPTER XXIII

WELLINGTON IN THE PENINSULA

"For this is England's greatest son,
He that gained a hundred fights,
Nor ever lost an English gun."—TENNYSON.

THERE is no need to discuss here the political and strategic results of the war in the Peninsula; but they are greater than is easily realised, and they supply one of the most striking examples of the Nemesis of wrong-doing to be found in political history. Napoleon told Foy, in 1810—nearly four years, that is, after he marched his troops into Spain, seized its fortresses, and deported its royal family—"I do not repent of what I did. I had to smash up that nation. Sooner or later they would have done me a bad turn." But what "bad turn" could Spain have possibly done to Napoleon to equal the gigantic disasters he brought upon himself by his seizure of Spain?

When, for example, the wrecked and defeated fragments of that vast host of 550,000 men that had invaded Russia struggled across the Beresina, and Napoleon started for Paris to create a new army, at

that very moment he had 300,000 good troops in the Peninsula, and some of his best subordinate officers.[1] On the Rhine they might have saved France for Napoleon. On the Ebro they were wasted. In 1813, fighting for existence again at Prussia and Austria, Napoleon won Bautzen with 140,000 men; at Leipzig, that "battle of nations," he had only 130,000 men. The French army in Spain at that date, according to the Imperial muster rolls, numbered 180,808 troops. Put into the French battle line at Leipzig, they would have changed history. In 1814 Napoleon was fighting, with swiftly dwindling forces, a desperate campaign against the allies in front of Paris. At that moment the forces under Soult and Suchet numbered over 100,000.

What more stupendous strategic blunder can be imagined than these facts represent? Napoleon, by seizing Spain, ensured his own defeat at the central and vital point, because half his military strength was expended on a distant and ill-fated enterprise. His Spanish policy cancelled out 400,000 good troops, and some of his best generals, when he was fighting for existence in front of his own capital. He invaded Spain in 1807, lest, in some unthinkable state of affairs, some Castanos, or Blake, with, say, 70,000 Spaniards, should invade France. What army Spain could have sent across the Pyrenees would have been one-half as formidable as the force of 67,000 men—

[1] Napier, vol. v. p. 420.

45,000 being British and German, an army with the victories of five campaigns playing about their bayonets—with which Wellington broke into the south of France at the moment when the armies of three nations were threatening Paris? No "bad turn" which Spain might have done to Napoleon could possibly have brought with it one-hundredth part of the mischief he brought on himself by invading Spain.

But the personal interest of the Peninsular War is found in the part played in it by Wellington. The story has a curiously picturesque aspect. It may be described as a procession of duels betwixt Wellington and one famous French general after another. Each duel brings a new antagonist on to the field, and is fought with new weapons. Wellington measured swords in turn with Junot, a reckless and impatient fighter; with Soult, a great strategist; with Victor, an eager, daring, and persistent soldier; with Masséna, "the best head" amongst all Napoleon's marshals, whose brain grew clearer in the tumult of battle, and who was unrivalled amongst the fighting-men of his day for obstinate valour; with Marmont, an adept in swift and daring tactics; with Jourdan, a soldier, perhaps, with a touch of the pedant, but a master in the art of war.

And what gives a keen intellectual interest to the story of the war in the Peninsula is the picture it offers of the evolution of a great captain, the visible

growth of Wellington himself in warlike skill, in self-confidence, in sureness of judgment and swiftness of stroke. Spain was a new field for him; the French were formidable antagonists. They had evolved battle-methods which had overthrown in succession the armies of every European Power. When Wellington stepped on that field, it is visibly in a mood of caution. He has to learn, in a sense, the grammar of a new language. The soldier that won Assaye is not visible at Roliça, with the slow advance of 12,000 British troops on a force of 8000 French. At Vimiero Wellington is standing on defence; he shows his gift for swift tactical movements, and, perhaps, if he had not been superseded on the very battlefield, he might have shown fire and daring in his pursuit of Junot. Then came a long break in the story. While Moore was making his thrust at Napoleon's communications, and so saving the whole south of Spain, Wellington was defending his reputation, and his career, before seven elderly general-officers, in a committee-room at Greenwich.

But the Wellington who lands at Lisbon on April 22, 1809, is very unlike the leader of the scanty battalions who landed at Mondego Bay in 1808; or at least he is in a quite different mood. He has tested French tactics at Roliça and Vimiero; he has mastered part, at least, of the lesson of Moore's great adventure; and there is a gleam of Assaye in the leap on Soult at Oporto. But the campaign against

Victor is, for Wellington, yet another experience. He has to learn how stubborn Spanish pride can be; how impenetrable Spanish stupidity; how unreliable Spanish faith; and he learned that lesson. "I have fished in many troubled waters," he said, after the campaign at Talavera, "but I will never fish again in Spanish troubled waters."

This was the dark hour for Wellington's reputation. His best officers had thought he failed. There were no better soldiers at that moment under the British flag than the three Napiers—Charles, William and George—and their letters reflect the wiser opinion of Wellington's army. "His advance to Talavera," says William Napier, "was an error, and the subsequent retreat, with the terrible after loss by sickness round Badajos, had given the troops a mean opinion of his generalship. He was called . . . rash and unskilful." Charles Napier, himself of a fierce genius in war, was at Wellington's headquarters in June 1810. Wellington told him "the French made the most regular retreats he ever saw at Roliça and Talavera."

"But," asks Napier, "did he follow that example? People say his march from Talavera to Alemtejo was very bad . . . I think Lord Wellington committed a great error in that campaign by trusting to the Spaniards after what Moore had experienced, and another in advancing too far when his retreat might be cut off. He was wrong also, I think, in fighting when the victory did him no good, and defeat must have destroyed him. His information was bad, and he trusted too implicitly. . . . His con-

duct in the battle showed great coolness and the most perfect self-possession, and by what I observe since I came here he seems to have learned a lesson from Talavera. Still the whole of that campaign is discreditable to him as a great captain, and he appears to have deserved the epithets of 'rash and imprudent.' . . . England has paid dearly in men and money for his education."

Napier caught his first glimpse of Wellington's greatness as a general in the stern refusal to risk a battle to succour Ciudad Rodrigo at the beginning of the campaign with Masséna. "He is blamed for this," he wrote, "but he is right, and it gives me a great confidence in the man." A few days later he writes:

"He is not the rash man he was, or Ciudad would ere this be relieved. . . . My persuasion is that the siege was little more than a battle trap for his Lordship, which he has not been caught in. . . . He is a much better general than I suspected him to be; that is, he has profited from his former errors. That he made them no one can doubt who hears the conversation of the army. He is not popular, less so even than was supposed."[1]

In 1810 Masséna appears on the scene, for Napoleon is quick to detect the emergence of a new and dangerous force in the Spanish problem. "Only the English count," he said, and Masséna is despatched, with 70,000 men, and with a carefully planned and deliberate strategy, to drive the British to their ships. Wellington does not fight Masséna as he fought Junot, or Soult, or Victor. He creates a vast and impregnable citadel in front of Lisbon, and fights Masséna with famine rather than with the

[1] "Life of Sir Charles Napier," vol. i. p. 130.

sword, though his stroke at Busaco was a hint of his fighting-power.

Even the best soldiers in the army failed to understand the skill and daring of Wellington's tactics against Masséna's. They despaired of success. On January, 18, 1810, Charles Napier wrote, "Wellington will not fight again unless he is mad or foolish." Yet that was the year of Busaco, and of Masséna's arrest by the lines of Torres Vedras. George Napier, who afterwards headed the forlorn hope of Ciudad Rodrigo, wrote in April of the same year, "Lord Wellington will hardly try to defend Portugal." "We shall lose half our army," Charles Napier wrote again in June, "if Lord Wellington risks a battle any great distance from Lisbon." Nine months afterwards Masséna, with a shattered army, was driven out of Portugal.

When Masséna has missed his blow, and is retreating, Wellington's pursuit, at first, is in the highest degree cautious. He keeps out of the hug of the bear. But in 1811 his strategy has grown in daring; he is visibly surer, both of himself and of his enemy. He shows himself keen in pursuit, swift in stroke, and at Fuentes he takes risks he would have shunned a few months earlier. In 1812 there is visible, in Wellington's campaign, a masterful strain —a certainty of movement, a sureness of judgment, a daring confidence in himself and in his troops— which gives a new complexion to the war. What is

there in all the records of those stormy years which, for daring and swiftness, can be compared with Wellington's swoop on the great fortresses in 1812?

But in the same year he has to meet a new and dangerous antagonist in Marmont; and there follows that tangle of swiftly marching and counter-marching columns, a duel as with rapiers; Wellington watching his antagonist, meanwhile, and forbearing his stroke till he had mastered the play, and then "beating 40,000 men in forty minutes" with the thunder-stroke of Salamanca.

In 1813 we see Wellington at the highest point of his art in Graham's great march past the right wing of the French, and in the crowning rout at Vittoria.

Perhaps Wellington never had a more dangerous antagonist than Soult in the stubborn fighting in the Pyrenees and before Bayonne in 1813. And it is most interesting to note how easy and sure is his confidence in himself and in his troops. He tells Lord Liverpool that "a mountain campaign is really the easiest of all, when a little time has been given to learning the ground." An amusing example may be given of his serene self-certainty.

At one of the black moments during the fighting in the Pyrenees Wellington, waiting for some orders he had given to be executed, said he was tired, and, dismounting from his horse, folded his cloak about him, lay down on the ground, and fell asleep. His staff, including some Spanish officers, stood near, and

they stared in wonder at the figure of their slumbering commander-in-chief. How could he sleep in such a spot, and at such a moment? They began to discuss the situation, and one of them said, raising his voice, "I always thought it would come to this. I was sure we should make a mess of it if we got entangled among the Pyrenees, and now, see if my words do not come true." It was Wellington's favourite aide-de-camp—Gordon—who spoke those words, and at that moment, as Gleig tells the story, Wellington awoke. "He sat up, and without addressing himself to any one in particular, extended his right hand open, and said, as he closed it, "I have them all in my hand, just like that." Not another word was spoken; and events showed that Wellington *had* them all in the palm of his hand.

After five years crowded with great battles and desperate sieges, and with perplexities—racial, financial, political—such as might have taxed to breaking-point the strongest human brain, Wellington emerges from the Pyrenees with every quality of a great soldier. He had struck down the most famous of Napoleon's marshals, one after another. Now only Napoleon himself—and Waterloo—remained.

PART IV

WATERLOO

CHAPTER I

BETWIXT TWO CAMPAIGNS

"Behold the Congress dissolved!"—NAPOLEON, *as he stepped ashore at St. Juan.*

THE long struggle in the Peninsula was over, and it might be supposed that Wellington would eagerly turn his face towards England, where the welcome of a grateful nation waited for him. There were sweeter and more intimate forces, indeed, calling him home. Out of eight years of wedded life more than six had been spent in active service abroad. He had not seen his wife for all those years; he had two sons whose voices he had never heard call him father. But Wellington was the most coldly philosophical of husbands, or, to put it more generously, public duty with him always outweighed domestic claims. All his generals had taken leave of absence during the war, but Wellington never. He was now asked by the British Cabinet to accept the embassy at Paris, and replied: "Although I have been so long absent from England . . . I feel no objection to another absence in the public service if it be necessary or desirable."[1]

[1] "Despatches," vol. xi. p. 688.

Wellington had sent home the Spanish and Portuguese forces under his command. His army, a fighting force equal in warlike value to Cæsar's Tenth Legion, or to Hannibal's African veterans, was broken up and sent, part to India, part to various stations in the Mediterranean and the West Indies; 14,000 Peninsular veterans were despatched to America—not, as it turned out, to add to their fame there. Wellington himself set out for Paris, reaching it on May 4, and this lean, sun-browned soldier, with his blunt speech and sword-edged common-sense, and the fame of his Peninsular campaigns upon him, at once became the most trusted counsellor of the allied Sovereigns.

Paris at the moment was a witch's cauldron, with many strange elements fermenting in it, and Wellington's personality, with his high standard of honour, his stubborn truthfulness, was a great and happy force. But Ferdinand VII. had begun his reign at Madrid, and was already displaying a more than Bourbon capacity for making blunders. Civil war in Spain seemed possible, and Wellington was asked to proceed to Madrid and give, at least, good advice to Ferdinand VII.—although it was doubtful whether that monarch had wit enough to profit by good advice when he received it.

Wellington left for Spain on May 10, having been only six days in Paris, reached Madrid on May 24, and was received with great honour. He left on

his return to Paris on June 5, having in that brief period done much by his personal influence to save Spain from being rent by civil war, as he had already saved it by his skill as a general from subjection to France. "I fear," he wrote to Lord Castlereagh, "that I have done little good; but," he added, "I think there will be no civil war at present." Wellington, however, accomplished one good thing while in Madrid. Part of the British subsidy for 1814—no less than £800,000—was still unpaid, and he made the immediate suppression of what he termed "that abominable traffic"—the slave trade—a condition on which this amount was paid into Ferdinand's treasury. Of all the British money that flowed into Spanish pockets during the Peninsular War, perhaps none yielded a better return than that particular sum of £800,000.

On June 23 Wellington reached London, and a whole nation, and politicians of every tint and men of all classes, joined in giving him such a welcome as probably no subject ever before received. From the crowds that deafened him with cheers as he put his feet on the pier at Dover, to the London crowd that took the horses from his carriage at Westminster Bridge, dragged it through the streets to Hamilton Place, where his wife lived, and lifted him in their arms and put him down on the threshold of his own door, all England joined in the welcome. He had already been raised to ducal

rank. Ministers asked Parliament to endow the new duke with a grant of £300,000, but an amendment from the Opposition benches raised the sum to £500,000. In the Commons he received personally the thanks of the House, all the members rising to do him honour when he entered to acknowledge what he described as "the noblest gift that any subject had ever received." In the House of Lords he was received in succession as baron, viscount, earl, marquis, and duke. Never before in British history had there been such an accumulation of honour in a single function upon one name. The London City Council gave him a stately banquet: only four years before the same Council had demanded an inquiry into his conduct. At a great thanksgiving service in St. Paul's, Wellington carried the Sword of State, and was the most distinguished figure in the vast assemblage.

But his stay in England was brief, and on August 22 he resumed his duties at the Paris Embassy. Paris, just then, was congested with dangerous elements. The human wreckage from all Napoleon's armies — idle, bitter, hungry — formed a seed-bed from which a revolution might easily spring up. Wellington's cool judgment read all the perils of the situation. "There are so many discontented people, and there is so little to prevent mischief," he wrote, "that an outbreak might occur on any night; and if it did occur I do not think I should

be allowed to depart."[1] The British Cabinet, as a matter of fact, were greatly concerned for Wellington's personal safety. It was known there were plots against his life, and various more or less plausible excuses for withdrawing him from Paris were suggested. He might take command of the forces in America, for example, with full powers to make peace or carry on the war, according to his judgment. "I feel no disinclination," Wellington replied, "to undertake the American concern, but, to tell you the truth, I think that under existing circumstances you cannot, at this moment, allow me to quit Europe; and," he added, "I confess I do not like to depart from Paris." His soldierly pride made the notion of being driven from his post by fear of the assassin's knife intolerable.

Towards the end of January, however, Wellington consented to take the place of Castlereagh at the Vienna Congress. In that strange many-tongued assemblage of kings and diplomatists Wellington was probably the one absoluely disinterested figure, with no other concern than to secure the peace, and the public order, of Europe. Castlereagh had written to Wellington that "never at any former period was so much spoil let loose for the world to scramble for," and all the royalties at Vienna were contending for a share in the booty. Prussia wished to absorb Saxony; Poland was claimed as her just reward by

[1] "Despatches," vol. ix. p. 422.

Russia; Austria had her private schemes in Italy and South Germany. The great Powers at Vienna, indeed, had already crystallised, under the stress of rival greeds, into two hostile groups. Austria, France, and England combined to resist the two northern Powers; and it seemed possible that war might break out afresh, with French troops standing in battle-line with British and Austrian troops against those of the King of Prussia and the Czar.

On this group of plotting diplomatists and mutually hating kings there suddenly broke the news that Napoleon had left Elba. A grand hunt had been arranged on the morning of March 7; princes and diplomatists were mounting for the sport, but Wellington quietly told his groom to take his horse back to the stable; he had received letters which must be answered. The letters brought the great news. According to a well-known story the tidings was received in the Congress by a burst of laughter; but after the laughter there came a sudden and anxious silence. For what point would Napoleon be making? It is curious to note that those who knew Napoleon best were least able to guess his objective. Talleyrand said, "He will land somewhere on the Italian coast and make for Switzerland." "No," said Metternich, "he will go straight to Paris"; and that is exactly what he did.

As a matter of fact, all the experts, including Wellington, misread the situation. Wellington

wrote to Castlereagh, "It is my opinion that Bonaparte has acted upon false or no information, and that the King of France will destroy him without difficulty in a short time." Those words show that Wellington, as far as French politics were concerned, was moving in worlds not realised. With a flash of wiser judgment he added, "If he does not the affair will be a serious one, and a great and immediate effort must be made." Napoleon himself, when he landed on the beach at San Juan, said, "Behold, the Congress is dissolved"; but, as a matter of fact, the touch of Napoleon's foot on French soil hushed all the discords of the Congress and welded it into unity. The peace of the world was at stake. On March 12, before it was yet known where Napoleon would make his appearance, the Allies drew up the famous declaration in which they announced that "neither peace nor truce was possible" with Napoleon. He was declared to be placed beyond the pale of civil and social relations, and "as the common enemy to the peace of the world" was delivered over to public justice.

Napoleon justified his new adventure by saying, "I caused the misfortunes in France, I ought to repair them." He could always clothe a selfish purpose in high-sounding syllables. Wellington offered an odd reading of the situation; the question, he said, turned upon the problem, "Can the Bourbons get Frenchmen to fight for them against Frenchmen?"

and events quickly interpreted that problem. The Bourbons fled before Napoleon's mere shadow. He overthrew Louis XVIII., and re-won France, without expending a cartridge.

When Napoleon reached the Tuileries, he claimed to start his political existence with a clean slate. He was once more, with the consent of the French nation, its ruler; and as the accepted ruler of France he was certainly not "beyond the pale of civil and social relations." As a proof of his desire for peace, he offered to ratify the Treaty of Paris. But the very purpose of that treaty was his exclusion from the French throne. How could Napoleon "ratify" that exclusion when he had cancelled it by re-entering France, and driving Louis XVIII. from that throne? As for his protestations of peace, he had no guarantee to offer, the Allies said, but his word; and that was nothing better than a desperate gambler's oft-broken pledge.

The four great Powers agreed to make common cause against Napoleon. Each undertook to contribute an army of 150,000 men. It was at first proposed to manage the campaign by a council, and the Emperor of Russia asked Wellington to become a member of the council. "I should prefer," he replied, "to carry a musket." An army of 600,000 soldiers representing four different nations and commanded by a council of war was, to Wellington's soldierly judgment, an absurdity.

War was certain and near, but the news found Great Britain strangely reluctant for war. "The truth is," Liverpool wrote, "the country is at this moment peace mad"—a noble madness! Yet if fighting had to be done, Great Britain could not stand back. She resumed at once her familiar office of paymaster, and Wellington was authorised to guarantee a subsidy of £5,000,000 to be divided according to his judgment amongst the great Powers; Great Britain, in addition, was to pay for the proportion in which her contingent was short of the agreed number of 150,000 men.

As the guns were about to speak again, Wellington's office of ambassador at Vienna ceased, and he was eager to reach the scene of action, but Castlereagh wrote that he "was not to expose himself by returning to the interior of France, unless in command of troops." The fear of any personal disaster happening to Wellington, which haunted the British Cabinet, is an odd proof of the value they attached to him as an asset in the national fortunes. Wellington himself wrote, "I confess that I believe if I had been at Paris when Bonaparte landed from Elba . . . I should have been seized, and at all events prevented from joining the army in Flanders." In that case the course of history might have been changed. Waterloo without Wellington would have been a strangely different battle. There would probably, indeed, have been no Waterloo.

Napoleon, on his part, had many difficulties. The

Bourbons had been in power only ten months, but he found they had left behind them a new France. The "taste for constitutions, debates, harangues," he complained, had reawakened. Here was a France, thirsty not for "glory" but for freedom; and even more thirsty for peace. With cynical courage Napoleon declared, "Public discussions, free elections, responsible Ministers, liberty of the press—I desire all that." He sighed, he protested, for "the repose of a constitutional king." Privately, however, he explained, "When peace is made—*nous verrons.* To each day its penalty, to each circumstance its law, to each one his nature; mine is not that of an angel." He knew that everything, now, must be decided by the sword, and he bent all the powers of his genius to the creation of an army; and that he showed in this business measureless energy and resource is certain. "The salvation of the country," he said, "turns on muskets"; and to the business of making muskets, and of enrolling soldiers to use them, he bent all the forces of his genius. But what he actually accomplished is, by most historians, absurdly over-estimated. It is usual to say that landing on March 6, with a little over 1000 followers, by the middle of June Napoleon had created an army of veterans and conscripts numbering, with its auxiliary forces, 535,000; by the beginning of October, according to Napoleon's own arithmetic, he would have 800,000 men under arms. But this is a very mis-

leading version. As a matter of fact, Napoleon, when he reached Paris, found ready to his hand a force of 223,972 men of all arms, officers included, giving an effective force, ready for service, of 155,000. By the early days of June he had raised this force to 277,000, out of which number less than 200,000 were ready to take the field. He had increased the strength of his army, that is, but had not greatly increased it.

It must be remembered that at the moment of his overthrow in 1814, the French armies, scattered through many lands, amounted to 451,000. Peace gave this great host back to France; in addition, at least, 150,000 French prisoners of war were released. There must have been in France, that is, some 600,000 soldiers who had served beneath the Imperial standard, and had actual knowledge of war. And yet, when the campaign began early in June, 1815, the total forces available for active service Napoleon had under his command were only 217,000, a fact which shows that not only was France, as a whole, tired of war, but that Napoleon had not won back to his standard even the majority of his old soldiers. And if Napoleon did not succeed in recalling to his standard all his old army, he did not win to his rule the whole nation. There was a splutter of civil war at many points during the Hundred Days. In the west it was so serious that, just before he set his columns on the march in the great concentric move-

ment which began the campaign, Napoleon had to despatch a brigade of the Imperial Guard, with two Infantry divisions, a force of 10,000 good soldiers, to put down the insurrection in Vendée. If those 10,000 troops had been in line at Waterloo, say when La Haye Sainte was captured, the close of the battle might have worn a very different complexion. It might be said, indeed, with some degree of plausibility, that Waterloo was lost before it was fought. It was lost, not on the slope of Mont St. Jean, but amongst the hills of Vendée.

Of Napoleon's marshals some stood aloof; Berthier, Victor, and Marmont had cast in their lot with the Bourbons; but Soult joined him, and was made chief of staff. Davoust became his Minister of War. Ney was at first doubtful of his reception. "You here?" said Napoleon to him, when he presented himself at one of his receptions. "I thought you had emigrated." "I ought to have emigrated long ago," was Ney's reply. But Napoleon could not do without "the bravest of the brave"; and as he started for the frontier on June 11, he said to his Minister of War, "Tell Ney that if he wants to take part in the first engagement he must be at Avesnes by the 14th. I shall have my headquarters there."

Some of the best of his old chiefs of columns joined Napoleon, such as Reille, D'Erlon, Vandamme, Lobau, Gerard; and the whole army he carried with

him to the new campaign was of great fighting value. It lacked discipline, no doubt; it fermented with jealousies; it was rather an army of adventurers than the fighting force of a nation. Houssaye describes it as "impressionable, critical, without discipline, without confidence in its leaders." There is no doubt that the army suffered from what may be called moral causes. A taint of mistrust ran through all ranks. Napoleon's masterful genius did not encourage independence or initiative amongst his generals. He found it equally difficult to forgive success or failure. As a matter of fact, it was perilous for a subordinate to succeed too well. "The decadence of the art of war in France," wrote a keen French critic—Rossel, himself a soldier—"dates from Napoleon. That self-contained and jealous genius, not wishing to have rivals, did not train pupils." It may be added that the French temperament lends itself easily to jealousy. Napoleon was jealous of his marshals; his marshals were jealous of each other; the army was jealous of the Guards, the Guards were scornful of the army. Nevertheless the army that followed Napoleon to Waterloo was made up of men who loved war for its own sake, and were on flame with a mingled thirst for vengeance and for booty. It was, says Houssaye, "more impetuous, more excited, more eager for the fray than any other Republican or Imperial army after or before it. Napoleon had never yet handled an

instrument of war which was at once so formidable—and so fragile." Waterloo proved its "fragility."[1]

When Wellington reached Brussels on April 4, he found waiting him a force, exclusive of garrisons, not more than 25,000 strong, of which 20,000 were Dutch-Belgians. By the middle of June it had increased to 106,000 men, with 196 guns; but it was an army of very mixed ingredients and very uncertain qualities. Many of his British regiments were nothing better than militia recruits; his Dutch-Belgian battalions were of worse than doubtful loyalty. "I have got," he wrote to Lord Stewart, "an infamous army, very weak and ill-equipped. In my opinion they are doing nothing in England; they have not raised a man; they have not called out the militia; they are unable to send me anything."[2] Wellington might have qualified that last statement by saying that the British War Office had sent him staff officers in embarrassing abundance, but most of them of very little value. "I might have expected," he wrote to Lord Bathurst, "that the generals and the staff formed by me in the last war would have been allowed to come to me again; but instead of that I am overloaded with people I have never seen before."[3]

Wellington had reason for discontent. He had met all Napoleon's marshals, in turn; but it was always with a better army under his command

[1] Houssaye, p. 48. [2] "Despatches," vol. xii. p. 358.
[3] Ibid., vol. x. p. 219.

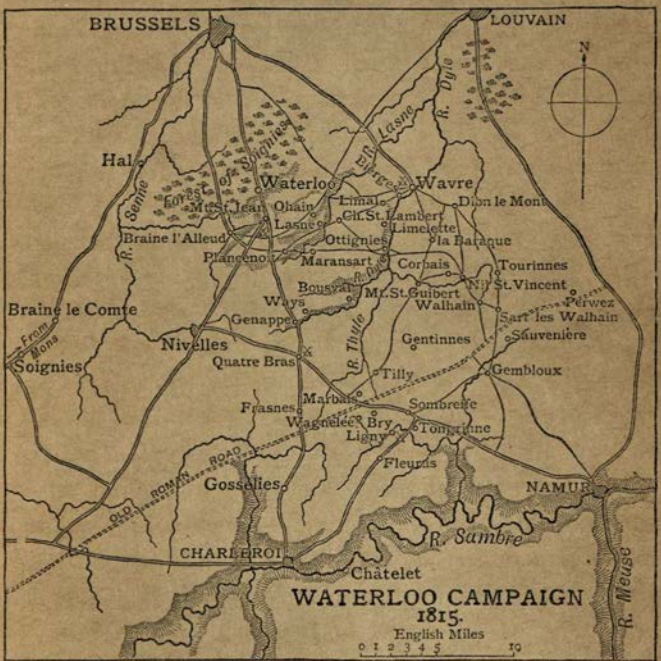
than that with which he now had to meet Napoleon himself. When he faced Joseph at Vittoria he had 41,449 British troops in battle-line; when he broke out of the Pyrenees to invade the south of France he had 36,000 British troops under his command. But he had not quite 24,000 British troops on the ridge at Waterloo, and many of them were militia recruits who had scarcely mastered more than the goose-step. Waterloo would have been fought and won in a shorter time, at less cost, and without the aid of a single Prussian cartridge, if Wellington, on June 18, had had under his command what he used to call his "Spanish infantry," the troops, say, that carried the Great Rhune, and pushed Soult back across the Nive and the Nivelle in 1813.

Creevey tells how, at Brussels, during the early days of June, he discussed with Wellington the prospects of the campaign. "I think," said Wellington, "Blucher and myself can do the thing." "Do you calculate," I asked, "upon any desertion of Bonaparte's army?" "Not upon a man, from the colonel to the private in the regiment. We may pick up a marshal or two perhaps, but not worth a d——. No, I think Blucher and I can do the business." Then, seeing a private soldier of one of our infantry regiments entering the park and gaping about at the statues and images, "There," he said, pointing at the soldier, "it all depends upon that article whether we do the business or not. Give me enough of it, and I

am sure."[1] The trouble was that he had not enough of "that article."

Blucher's army by the middle of June numbered 120,000 men, with 300 guns, and, on the whole, it was an army of fine quality. But both armies—British and Prussian—were scattered over an immense front, stretching from Oudenarde, on the right, to Liége, on the left, a distance of a hundred miles. The British held by far the most exposed position of the whole front of the Allies. The Prussian right was covered by the British, their left by the Austrian and Russian forces, coming slowly into the field. "I," Wellington wrote, "am at the advance post of the whole. The greatest part of the enemy's force is at the front, and if I am satisfied, others need not be under any apprehension." And it was because his right, at Hal, was the most exposed point in the long line held by the allied forces that Wellington kept most jealous guard over it. If he surrendered that point he uncovered his communications with his base, whence supplies and reinforcements reached him. An attack on the British right, Wellington thought, would give Napoleon a chance—perhaps the best chance—of fighting one of the allied armies singly; and so he expected him to strike at that point. By attacking the centre, he ran the risk, which in the end proved his ruin, of having to fight both armies at once.

[1] "The Creevey Papers," p. 228 (one volume edition).



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CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MOVES

"There never existed a general in whose presence it was less safe to make a false movement."—WELLINGTON (*of Napoleon*).

ON the night of June 14 Ziethen's outposts saw kindling, in the black skies to the south-east, a dull red glow stretching far into the darkness. Read by a soldier's eye, that menacing crimson sign, hanging in the heavens, was perfectly intelligible. It was flung from the camp fires of some great army beyond the hills. Napoleon, bent on hiding the point at which he would cross the frontier, had directed that no fires should be lit on the northern slopes of the hills; but he forgot that the camp fires of 125,000 men, even if lit in the southern valleys, would write themselves, on the night sky, in gigantic characters of flame visible to a hundred villages.

Ziethen, an alert soldier, sent the news of that flaming signal to Blucher, whose headquarters were at Namur, twenty miles distant; and, with characteristic energy, Blucher ordered all his divisions to stand at attention, ready to move. A despatch was sent to Bulow, at Liége, thirty-six miles distant,

directing him to march at once with his corps. One of the odd blunders with which the Four Days' campaign is pustuled robbed that message of its effect. Bulow was at his outposts when the despatch arrived. His chief of staff neither opened the despatch nor forwarded it, and Bulow, returning to his quarters the next day at ten o'clock, found it lying still unopened. But for that blunder Bulow would have been on the march for Ligny to join his chief ten hours earlier, and would have brought 40,000 additional troops into the battle-line at Ligny. In that event Waterloo might have been unnecessary.

At half-past three on the morning of June 15 Napoleon's outposts crossed the frontier, his whole army, marching at speed towards Charleroi, in three great masses—the centre in advance, giving a wedge-like formation to the movement—thus striking at the centre of the Allies' forces, scattered at that moment from Oudenarde on the west, to Liége on the east, a distance of 100 miles. From Charleroi a good road runs for thirty-six miles straight to Brussels. Napoleon's marching orders were a miracle of ingenious arrangement. He had thought out the position and movement of every battalion in the recesses of his brain, and timed their march with minutest accuracy. "He had never issued marching orders better thought out," says Houssaye, "even in the happy days of Austerlitz and Friedland." The time at which each division moved was

so adjusted to the general distribution of the whole that, if followed, the great army would flow on with the smoothness of a gliding river.

The most ingenious plans, however, are apt to get tangled when translated into concrete terms. D'Erlon, with the right wing, started an hour and a half late; Vandamme, who led the left wing, received no orders, and only learned he was to move when the corps in his rear came up. Bourmont, in command of the leading division of the 4th Corps, deserted with his entire staff. "I refuse," he wrote to his commanding officer, Gerard, "to join in establishing in France a sanguinary despotism which would ruin my country." Bourmont should have reached that virtuous decision before he accepted a command from Napoleon, instead of waiting till a battle was in sight. But though with some loss of order, and much loss of time, still the great army pushed on.

At the first gleam of dawn the French advance opened fire on Ziethen's outposts at Thuin. The Prussians were stubborn, but were swept back with cruel loss, and before ten o'clock the heads of the French columns were on the Sambre. The Prussians failed to blow up the bridges; as Wellington found out afterwards, when Blucher proposed to blow up the Jena bridge in Paris, they were not experts in that business. The bridge at Charleroi is approached by a long and narrow dyke, and the Prussians held

it so resolutely that the French cavalry failed to carry it. Napoleon's infantry columns were far behind, and the bridge was not carried till after mid-day. But by three o'clock the French were across the Sambre at various points, and Napoleon himself rode into Charleroi and dismounted in front of the little village inn. A chair was brought outside, and he sat down at the side of the road, while his troops, dusty and foot-sore, defiled past him. As they caught sight of him, they broke out into a tumult of greeting. The roll of drums, the clarion notes of the bugles, and the hoarse shouts of the marching battalions swelled into a long-sustained tempest of sound. They had been brought by the impulse of the Emperor's brain from a score of widely separated points, and suddenly found themselves flowing together into an army, an army on the march, across their enemy's frontier moving to some great battlefield. No wonder the inflammable French imagination took fire. Many soldiers broke from their ranks eager if only to touch the horse of the Emperor.

Amid all that tumult of sound Napoleon fell fast asleep. Still the crowded columns, horse and foot and guns, rolled past him, and still the dusty soldiers broke into frantic cheers as they came in sight of his figure. But through it all Napoleon sat back in his chair, with pendulous cheeks, open mouth and widespread limbs. It was the march

of the gladiators, with their "*Morituri te salutamus Cæsar*"; only in this case their drowsy "Cæsar" failed to pay his gladiators, on their way to death, the compliment of keeping awake to listen to their shouts. It is true that he had been in the saddle for some seven or eight hours, but so had every man in his cavalry divisions, while the dusty and foot-sore infantry soldiers had been on foot as long.

News presently came that Gosselies on the Charleroi road, five miles off, was black with Prussian battalions, and Napoleon awoke to hurry on some regiments of the Young Guard and a battery of horse artillery to clear them from his front. Just then—it was a little after three—Ney arrived, and the columns still defiling past recognised him with shouts. "All will go well now," they cried, "there is Red-head." Ney's flaming locks were welcomed as a battle-sign. He had reached the columns that morning in a sufficiently ignoble fashion—riding in a peasant's cart. He had picked up a couple of horses from a friendly general, but had only a single aide-de-camp. With a dozen hurried words Napoleon put him in command of the First and Second Army Corps—his left wing—with the light cavalry of his Guard. "Now," he said, "you can go and drive the enemy from the road, and take up a position at Quatre Bras."

Ney was thus put verbally "in command" of

Napoleon's left wing; but the actual "command" of a great body of troops is not to be transferred at a breath, and with half-a-dozen syllables. A general cannot "command" an army till he has it all within the range of his knowledge, and until he is in possession of the machinery which will make every part of that force answer to each pulse of his will. What are the muscles and limbs of a body with no nervous system co-ordinating them, and linking them to the brain? Ney had no such command of the foot-sore columns stretched in unrelated fragments over fourteen miles, and suddenly thrust in this fashion into his hands, and his failure at Quatre Bras was chiefly due to this fact.

Napoleon guessed that Wellington would be marching from Brussels to Quatre Bras, while Blucher would be pushing at speed along the Nivelles road from Namur. His plan was to establish his headquarters at Fleurus, making that the apex of a triangle, with his right wing at Sombreffe, his left at Quatre Bras, and the section of the Namur road betwixt these two places, a distance of ten miles, as the base of the triangle. To effect a junction, Blucher, coming from Namur, or Wellington from Brussels, must traverse that particular section of the road; and Napoleon could fall upon whichever arrived first. If both fell back the allied army would be broken in two, and the road to Brussels would lie open.

This was ingenious strategy. It failed because Blucher concentrated at Ligny, south of that particular section of the road, and because Wellington defeated Ney's attempt to seize Quatre Bras.

Ziethen's stubborn defence, and Blucher's promptitude in giving orders for the concentration of his divisions on the first hint that the French were moving, worked very happily for the Prussians. Napoleon, who had an extraordinary faculty for persuading himself that what he wished to happen had actually occurred, was persuaded on the night of the 15th that Grouchy, with his right wing, had seized Sombreffe, and Ney, with his left wing, was in possession of Quatre Bras. He believed that Blucher was falling back, though he ought to have known that hot-blooded, hard-fighting general better. But on the night of the 15th Napoleon was moving in a world of dreams. He had drawn out a plan of operations for the 16th. He would sweep out of existence any Prussians on his right wing, join Ney with his left at Quatre Bras, and march on Brussels. He timed the head of his columns to reach that city at seven o'clock on the morning of the 17th.

But on the morning of the 16th a rider came in from Grouchy reporting that solid masses of Prussians, marching from Namur, had swung to their left off that road, and were moving on St. Amand. They were really on their way to Ligny, a position which Blucher had already noted as a

fit field for a great fight. Instead of waiting for Napoleon to swoop down upon him from Fleurus, he was marching to the spot he had chosen; and Blucher contemplated the business of meeting Napoleon there with delightful confidence. "With my 120,000 Prussians," he wrote to his wife, "I would engage to take Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers, if there were not the sea to cross."

At 11 A.M. the converging Prussian columns began to arrive at Ligny, Ziethen coming first, with 28,000 men. Before night 83,000 troops were taking up their positions for the coming battle, and Blucher held Wellington's assurance, written on June 13, "My army will be concentrated at Nivelles or Quatre Bras according to circumstances, twenty-two hours after the first cannon-shot." It was clear that Napoleon's columns would *not* reach Brussels "at daybreak on the 17th." The plan for breaking the allied forces in two had failed; betwixt Napoleon and Brussels stood two stern and fiercely contested battlefields—Ligny and Waterloo.

Napoleon's first move in the great game, in brief, was less successful than it seemed to be. The heads of his three columns were across the Sambre, but their tails were stretching far in the rear. The head of Ney's column was at Frasnes, a little south of Quatre Bras, but his divisions were scattered over a line of fourteen miles, the rear being still on the right bank of the Sambre. The leading battalions

had been on foot for eighteen hours, and had marched twenty-five miles. The centre column had been marching for the same period, and was scattered over a line of nine miles. Lobau, with the Young Guard and most of the heavy cavalry, was still at Charleroi. Not much striking power remained to troops who were thus scattered over great distances and exhausted with an eighteen hours' march.

No doubt an energetic impulse from Napoleon might have set his tired columns marching again before dawn on the 16th; by nine o'clock Ney might have had 40,000 troops in front of Quatre Bras, and Napoleon could have struck at Blucher's corps gathering at Ligny, while their concentration was still incomplete. But Napoleon no longer had energy for such an effort. He still had the wizard-like brain that could plan a great campaign, but he had lost the compelling and masterful will, say, of Jena and of Austerlitz. He was in the prime of life, of the same age as Wellington, but he had not the Englishman's clean-blooded physical energy. His brain had sudden and curious failures of power. It went mysteriously to sleep at inopportune times. It would work with the speed, and range, and exactitude of a supernatural machine up to a certain point, and then it suddenly fell inert. It seemed to lose the power to remember, to co-ordinate, to command.

On the morning of the 16th hours went by and Napoleon gave no orders. He seemed to be without a plan. His centre and right were in front of Fleurus, with the Prussians gathering on the slope at Ligny before them. Ney was at Frasnes, with Quatre Bras slenderly held, waiting for his stroke. But not till betwixt eight and nine o'clock did Napoleon issue any orders. It was one o'clock before he joined his outposts at Fleurus. Here he climbed up the rough wooden stairs of a windmill, made his sappers break a gap in its circular roof, and improvise a balcony from whence he studied the landscape. A long gentle slope, rising from a tiny stream, bordered with willows and hedges, lay at his feet; three or four clusters of houses were scattered along the edge of the stream, or on the upward slope. The low, flat hill was rich with ripening corn, but its soft tints of green and yellow were broken by moving squares and oblongs of black. They were Blucher's divisions falling into battle-line. Every hour of that morning was worth untold gold to Napoleon. Their waste meant the loss of great opportunities. It multiplied the strength of the forces gathering to oppose him. And yet Napoleon let the precious hours slip by. The active campaign lasted only three days; and on the morning of each day Napoleon loitered in a fashion which is still the puzzle of history.

But Napoleon loitered because he misread the

situation. He believed that the British and Prussian armies had fallen asunder before, so to speak, his very breath. Blucher, he imagined, was falling back towards Liége, Wellington towards Antwerp or Ostend. He had nothing to do but to brush aside the Prussian rear-guard, and push on in a night-march to Brussels. The heads of the French columns, he calculated, would reach that city at seven o'clock in the morning. Houssaye—a French writer, and, therefore, taking the view that most flatters French susceptibilities—says that Napoleon was the victim of a deadly intellectual vice. He mistook his own dreams for certainties; when he had once imagined a thing, that thing had to be as he fancied.

It is the test of sane genius that it always sees facts in their hard reality, but Napoleon's genius was of another type. It treated facts as non-existent, if they were in quarrel with his desires or guesses. And since he believed that both the British and the Prussians were falling back, on diverging lines, before him, he acted on that belief, and persisted in treating Blucher's three corps at Ligny as the rear-guard of a retreating army, and directed Ney to act at Quatre Bras as though Wellington and the British army did not exist.

To this has to be added the fact that Napoleon undervalued his opponents. He knew Blucher, who was a fighter to the tips of his fingers. "That old devil, Blucher," he said, "may be beaten at night; he

is always ready to fight again in the morning." But he did not know Wellington, and he did not know the British and their fighting quality. "I tell you," he said to Soult, on the morning of Waterloo, "Wellington is no general, and the English are poor fighters. It will only be a *déjeuner*." But Wellington was a cool and deadly fighter, more deadly, indeed, than Blucher, because he was cooler; and the two generals made a very formidable combination. Wellington was not another Schwartenberg, slow-blooded and timorous. In mere fighting energy, in swiftness of stroke and audacity of conception, he was Blucher's equal; while there was an ice-cool quality in his courage, and a great captain's skill in his leadership, to which Blucher had no pretensions.

The Prussians were drawn up in fighting form across Napoleon's path on the night of the 15th much more promptly than the British. While Blucher's divisions were concentrating at Ligny, and Ney was threatening Quatre Bras with a force which might easily have been raised to 20,000, Wellington had not yet moved a man; and seas of ink have been expended ever since—mainly by arm-chair critics—either in explaining why Wellington did not move earlier, or in blaming him for failing to move. In the main there were three reasons which kept Wellington at "attention," indeed, all through the 15th, but still not setting his divisions on the march. One was his knowledge of Napoleon and his char-

acter. "There never existed," in his own words, "a general in whose presence it is less safe to make what is called a false movement." To quote his own words again, he "would not shift a corporal's guard until he was certain of his enemy's plans." Then he had an obstinate persuasion that Napoleon would strike at his right wing, and not at the centre of the allied forces. He would move on Brussels by Tournai, or by Mons, not by Charleroi; and that is why he kept, even under the strain of actual fighting at Waterloo, 18,000 troops at Hal, the junction of these two roads.

The third reason which kept Wellington from moving on the 15th was the failure—it might almost be called the conspiracy of failure—to send him news from the outposts. Everybody responsible for sending news failed to do so. Dornberg failed to report the absence of any movement on Wellington's right; Ziethen failed to send news when he was attacked at Charleroi; Blucher failed to notify that the Prussian forces were to concentrate at Sombreffe at midnight on June 14. For hours during the 15th Prussians and French had been contending in the valley of the Sambre, within ten miles of the British outpost at Frasnes, and within less than forty miles of Wellington's headquarters at Brussels; and Wellington knew nothing about it. At the first hint that the French were moving, Blucher removed his headquarters from Namur to Sombreffe; and if

Wellington had ridden to Nivelles early on the 15th, he would have certainly read aright the sound of guns in the direction of Charleroi. But at that moment he still expected to hear the sound of those guns from Ath, or Braine le Comte.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of the 15th the Prince of Orange brought him news, but it was only the news of heavy firing in the direction of Thuin—an alarm from the outposts. Ziethen's report that his outposts were attacked reached Wellington about the same time, but there was nothing in it to show that Napoleon with his whole army was striking at Charleroi.

The attack on Ziethen began at five in the morning, and the news of it might have reached Wellington by nine o'clock; in that case, as Wellington himself wrote afterwards, "The orders given at five in the evening would have been issued at ten in the morning"; and that gain of seven hours would have put 30,000 men in battle-line at Quatre Bras when Ney at two o'clock made his attack. But in the absence of definite news, Wellington all through the 15th simply kept his divisions standing at attention.

If Wellington had only faint and imperfect knowledge of what was happening at the outposts, his chief officers at the British headquarters were in a state of blank ignorance. Sir A. Fraser, in command of the British horse artillery, writes at 6 A.M. on

June 16, "I have just heard that the Duke moves in half-an-hour. . . . Nothing can be done to-day." Yet that was the day of Quatre Bras. A little later he writes, "Our army is concentrating at Braine l'Alleud"—just south of the field of Waterloo. At that moment Blucher's three corps were concentrating at Ligny; there had been eleven hours' fighting between Charleroi and Fleurus; the guns were beginning to speak at Quatre Bras.

That Quatre Bras was occupied at all was due to an offence which Wellington was, of all generals, least apt to forgive, the actual disobedience—an "intelligent disobedience," it is true—of his orders. Perponcher was in command of the Bylandt brigade at Nivelles. Wellington's latest orders directed the entire Netherlands corps to concentrate at that point, and this would have called in a battalion under Major Normann at Frasnes, and left Quatre Bras open. Normann, however, when he heard the sound of French guns in his front, with the instinct of a good soldier held on to Frasnes, and brushed back with his fire the French cavalry outposts. Prince Bernard of Saxe-Weimar, with the same instinct, took his brigade from Genappe to Quatre Bras, and Perponcher, instead of remaining at Nivelles, moved on with his brigade to Quatre Bras. He did what Wellington would have done had he known the facts, and been on the ground—not what Wellington ordered in ignorance of the facts, and from a distance

of thirty-three miles. And Wellington, when he reached Quatre Bras at ten o'clock on the morning of the 16th, and found Perponcher's division entrenched there, forgave that act of wise and happy disobedience.

The question, of course, arises whether Quatre Bras *ought* to have been occupied by the British. Did Prince Bernard deserve praise or blame for occupying Quatre Bras in disobedience of his orders? Wellington forgave him for it, but had he any reason for gratitude? There is strong evidence that Wellington did not intend it should be occupied; Napoleon assumed it would not be occupied; and, says Maurice, "when Wellington and Napoleon are both entirely agreed on a question of war, he is a bold man who traverses their opinion."

Maurice argues that both Wellington and the Prussians fought as they would not have fought "had not one been committed by a subordinate, and the others misinformed by their allies."[1]

On the whole, perhaps the critics have erred in attaching an almost superstitious importance to the position of the allied forces at Quatre Bras. It is true that if the French had seized that point, Blucher and Wellington could not have united by the Namur road; but Blucher on the 15th could have done what he did on the night of the 16th, and fallen back on Wavre, without paying the dread-

[1] *United Service Magazine.*

ful price of Ligny; and this would have given Bulow's corps of 30,000 good troops time to join him. Wellington could have taken his stand at Waterloo without losing 4500 of his best troops at Quatre Bras; and the junction of the two armies would have been complete. Napoleon, it is to be noted, believed that Blucher would concentrate at Wavre. To fix the point of concentration at a point so open to the stroke of an energetic enemy as Ligny or Quatre Bras cannot be regarded as wise strategy. It is certain, indeed, that on the morning of the 16th, when Wellington found himself with only 7000 troops, principally Belgians, in front of Ney with 9000 good infantry, and Kellerman's heavy cavalry, he would, on purely military grounds, have fallen back. He held on to Quatre Bras all through the confused and perilous fighting of that day simply out of loyalty to his ally.

On the evening of the 15th, Wellington attended the famous ball in Brussels, the best-remembered social function perhaps in history. It gleams still, a little point of festive light, set on the edge of two great battles. Before going, he had fixed 4 A.M. as the time for the troops in Brussels to fall in. Later—plainly as a result of fuller news reaching him—the time was changed to 2 A.M., and this change in the hour perhaps explains why, amongst the dead on the field at Quatre Bras, were officers who still wore the pumps and silk stockings of the

ball-room. They returned from the ball to find that the bugles were sounding the advance; their baggage was gone, and they had to follow in ball-room rig.

Wellington has been both abused and praised with equal energy for going to that ball. Houssaye sneers at him for doing so. Maxwell quotes it as proving his ignorance of the movements of the French. "Had he realised that Napoleon's advance-guard was bivouacked within two miles of the left of his army, is it possible that he would have loitered . . . among fiddles and champagne?" But Wellington's motive in going to the ball is perfectly clear. Muffling tells how Wellington said to him: "My troops are on the point of marching, but here in Brussels the partisans of Napoleon are beginning to agitate, and we must reassure our friends. Therefore, let us show ourselves at the Duchess of Richmond's ball, and we will be in the saddle by five to-morrow morning."

Wellington was cheerful, not to say gay, during the ball, but many noticed that despatches were constantly coming in to him, that he would sometimes stop in the middle of a sentence, and whisper to some officer. Before four o'clock the sound of bugles mingled with the hum of many voices in the ball-room. The Highland brigade went past, its pipes shrilling to the tune of "Highland Laddie." The list of the guests at that historic ball is still preserved; they number 220 in all, and it is pathetic

to notice how many names in that list find a place in the list of the killed and wounded at Quatre Bras, or at Waterloo.

Before leaving, Wellington asked the Duke of Richmond if he had a good map in his house. He was taken into his host's dressing-room. The map was spread out, Wellington shut the door, and said, "Napoleon has humbugged me, by G——. He has gained twenty-four hours' march on me. I have ordered the army," he went on to say, "to concentrate at Quatre Bras, but we shall not stop him there, and, if so, I must fight him here," at the same time passing his thumb-nail over the position of Waterloo. That scratch of Wellington's nail on the map long remained, the first scar of Waterloo. Napoleon had "humbugged" him by advancing on the route where Wellington did not expect him; but, as Wellington held to the day of his death, it was the wrong route, and if Napoleon gained twenty-four hours by taking it, he lost great opportunities.

A little after seven in the morning, Wellington was riding to Quatre Bras, passing Picton's divisions on the road. He reached Quatre Bras at ten o'clock, found the French making no movement there, and rode to Ligny to confer with Blucher. As they rode Wellington asked Hardinge, who came from Blucher's headquarters, how Blucher's divisions were forming. "In column, not in line," was Hardinge's

reply. "The Prussian soldier, Blucher says, will not stand in line." "Then the artillery will play upon them, and they will be beaten damnably," said Wellington, condensing into that profane adverb the fortunes of the coming battle.

From the window of a mill at Bussy, Blucher and Wellington watched the French columns deploying into battle-line. "What do you wish me to do?" Wellington asked. It was suggested that he should march all his troops behind Brye to act as a reserve to the Prussians; Muffling urged that the British should manœuvre so as to outflank the French left. Wellington listened, and ended by saying, "Well, I will come, if I am not attacked myself." Then casting his eyes on Blucher's forces drawn up in solid black masses, from the edge of the little stream almost to the crest of the long slope, and exposed in every file, he said, "Every general knows his own men, but if my lines were drawn up in this fashion, I should expect to be beaten. I should withdraw all the columns I see scattered about in front, and get more of the troops in the shelter of the rising ground." "However," he added, as he told the story, "they seemed to think they knew best, so I came away." "If they fight here," he said to Hardinge, as they rode away, "they will be damnably mauled." To his own staff he said, "If Bonaparte be what I suppose he is, the Prussians will get a —— good licking to-day."

The interview in the mill at Bussy took place betwixt one and two o'clock; the French columns were deploying at that instant for attack. This, at least, proves that Blucher was not induced to make a stand at Ligny by any promise that Wellington would fall into battle-line with him. He was committed to the fight before consulting with Wellington. But the interview further proves that Napoleon's whole strategy had already suffered defeat. His plan was to separate the two armies, and beat each in turn; but before the first shot was fired at Ligny, Wellington and Blucher had met and agreed on the strategy which led to Waterloo.

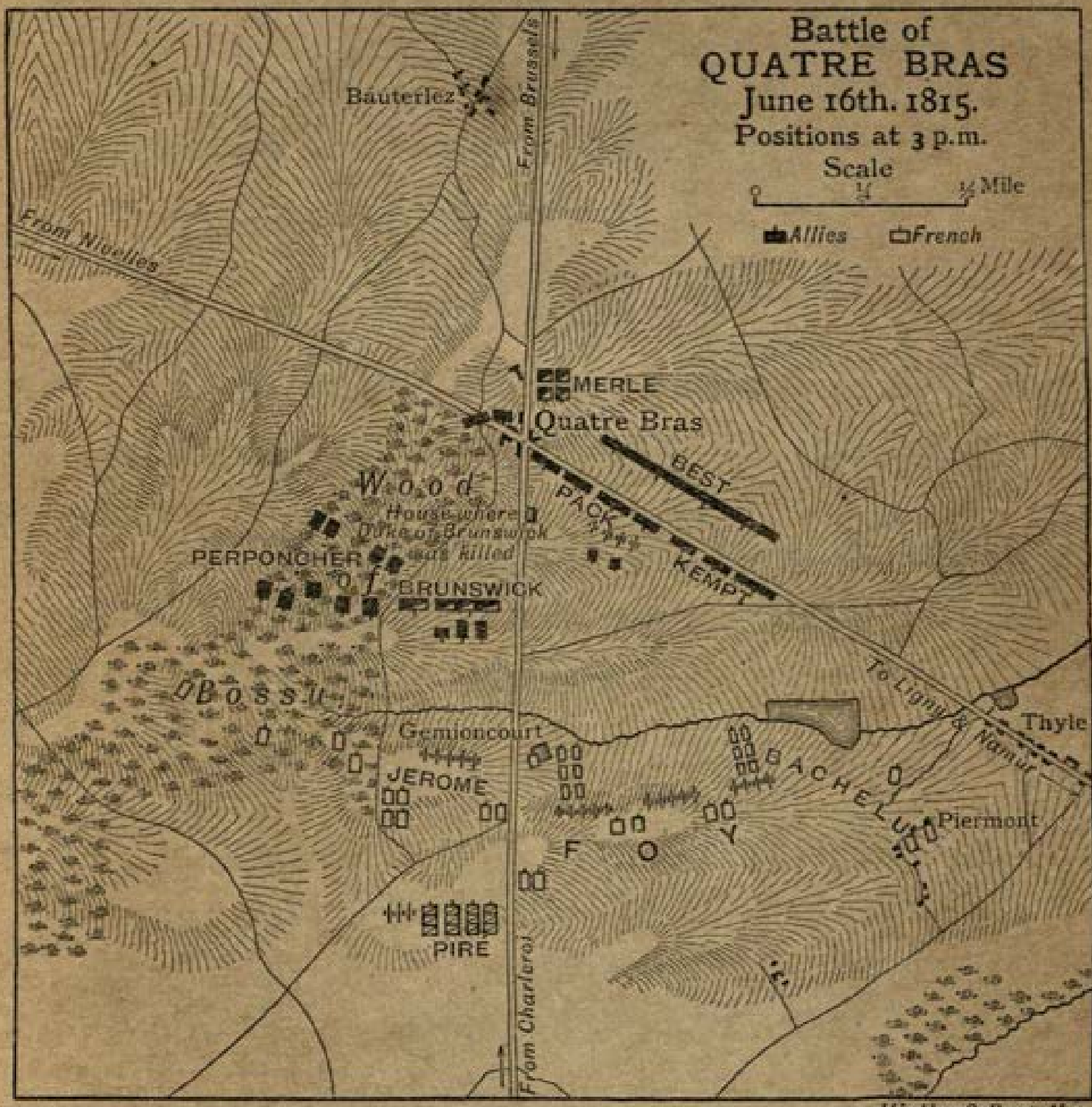
It is quite true that Wellington found enough to occupy him at Quatre Bras, and Blucher had to fight his battle alone; and yet Wellington helped Blucher magnificently at Ligny. If he had not held Quatre Bras, not only D'Erlon, but Ney, might have been flung into the fight against the Prussians, and Blucher would have been destroyed. Wellington wrecked Napoleon's strategy by keeping his forces divided. Ligny and Quatre Bras are parted by a distance of seven miles, but the two battles were fought simultaneously; each may be regarded as only a fragment of one great struggle; and Wellington "contained" Napoleon's left wing, so that Blucher had only to meet Napoleon's centre and right.

CHAPTER III

QUATRE BRAS

QUATRE BRAS is a battle of many crises; they can be counted and measured by the clock. It was a crisis when Wellington reached the battlefield after his interview with Blucher. Ney, with 9000 infantry, nearly 2000 cavalry and 22 guns, was in the act of flinging himself upon 7000 Dutch-Belgian troops, with sixteen guns and no cavalry, and it was clear that the position would be carried. Wellington saved the fight for the moment by a fine stroke of leadership. He played a game of bluff. He advanced his left wing through the deep rye with loud beating of drums, as though in confident attack. The sight of mounted officers and of regimental flags advancing through the sea of ripening corn checked the French. Ney, too, knew Wellington's trick of showing only a scanty force and keeping powerful reserves unseen, and he halted his columns; so the crisis for the moment was passed.

Presently the French came on again. They



Walker & Boutall sc.

broke through the centre of the allied line and pushed back its left; the great farmhouse of Gemioncourt was captured; a column of infantry, 8000 strong, had joined Ney, and the battle again seemed lost. At that moment a brigade of Dutch-Belgian cavalry made its appearance from Nivelles. They were at once sent into the fight, but were charged by the French horse and routed. At three o'clock, up the low road north of Quatre Bras, a splash of moving red colour was seen. It was Picton's division. They had left Brussels at five o'clock in the morning, reached Quatre Bras at three o'clock, and plunged at once into the fight.

Ney, pressed by vehement orders from Napoleon, now flung his whole force into the battle. He was overwhelmingly strong in artillery and cavalry, and Kellerman's fiery squadrons threatened to sweep over the whole field. At half-past five o'clock Halkett's brigade, with some Hanoverian troops and two batteries of guns, reached the field from Nivelles; but still the overpowering superiority of the French in cavalry made the battle perilous; and not till the arrival of the Guards at half-past six had Wellington a superiority which enabled him to drive the French back from all the positions they had won.

All Wellington's reinforcements thus reached the battlefield, so to speak, in driblets; all came ex-

hausted with the speed and length of their march; and it needed fine generalship to hold the position under such conditions against the French army, with Kellerman as its cavalry leader, Reille and Bachelu to command the infantry, and Ney to direct the whole. How great the strain of battle was, is told by the manner in which nearly the whole of the Dutch-Belgian troops, 7000 strong, dissolved in the process, and left the field, flooding all the roads that led to it, and carrying everywhere the news of the defeat of the British. Mercer, who was bringing up his battery to the scene of the fight, struck the stream of deserters at Nivelles. "The road," he says, "was covered with soldiers, many quite untouched, a wounded man, with perhaps six, eight, ten, or even more attendants. When questioned about the battle and why they had left it, the answer was invariable. 'All is lost. The English are destroyed, routed. All of them, all of them.'"

"In this ignoble stream of deserters," says Mercer, "one red-coat we did meet." He was a private of the 92nd, a short, rough, hardy-looking fellow, with the national high cheek-bones and a complexion that spoke of many a bivouac. "He was severely wounded, and came limping along, evidently with difficulty, and suffering. I stopped him to ask news of the battle, telling him what I had heard from the others. 'Na, na, sir; it's aw a

damned lee; they war fechtin' yat an' I left 'em; but it's a bludy business, and thar's na saying fat may be the end on't. Oor regiment was nigh clean swept aff, and oor colonel kilt just as I cam' awa'.'" It may be added that the brotherhood of soldiers is sincere, though their surgery is rough. The surgeon in Mercer's troop made the Highlander sit down on the parapet of the bridge, took out his instruments, extracted the ball from the poor fellow's leg, and sent him hobbling along towards Nivelles, having borne the operation without a word.

Quatre Bras was fought on a sort of triangle of golden wheatfields and patches of tall green rye, framed on either side with woods. Quatre Bras itself, a cluster of cottages, is the apex of the triangle, the wood of Bossu forms one of the containing sides, the Nivelles road the other; while the Charleroi road bisects the triangle and crosses the Nivelles road at Quatre Bras itself. The British held the apex and the two sides, the French attacked from the base, having captured the farmhouse of Gemioncourt, with another cluster of buildings to the east. The hedgeless farmland sloped to a tiny stream, and in this triangle, on which the ripening wheat and the tall rye stood thick, the battle waged for five desperate hours. The position of Gemioncourt and Piermont gave the French a safe base for their attacks; their superiority in guns enabled them to sweep the whole sloping triangle with their fire, and

on the two roads their cavalry was able to charge with great advantage. The battle had many picturesque features; in some respects it was a transcript in little of the great struggle betwixt the British squares and Ney's cavalry at Waterloo forty-eight hours later.

When Picton came into the fight a great attack was in progress, two huge columns moving up betwixt the Charleroi and the Nivelles roads. Picton took the regiments of Kemp's and Pack's brigades in line to meet the French, and through the rustling corn the steady front of muskets and bayonets moved on the heads of the hostile columns. The sudden musketry blast of the long red line was shattering, and when, with a shout, Picton's men brought their bayonets to the level and charged, the French broke and were swept back to the foot of the slope. But two regiments of French cavalry rode in on the British infantry; the Brunswick hussars, brought up to meet them, were routed, the Duke of Brunswick was slain, and his broken squadrons, with the French hanging on their rear, swept, a torrent of men and horses, on the line of the British infantry. The French lancers rode past the flank of the 42nd and 44th, wheeled suddenly, and charged on their rear. The 42nd was in the act of forming square, but the charging horsemen were too close. One face of the square was driven in, and the French lances wrought great havoc. But a square of Scottish infantry, with one face

broken, can still fight. Its colonel was slain, its lieutenant-colonel and major wounded; but the regiment shook itself into shape again; every Frenchman who had broken into the square was shot or bayoneted, and the 42nd still held its place in the line. The 44th made no attempt to form square. Its colonel gave the quick order, "Rear rank right-about face," and in a moment the rear rank became a line of levelled muskets, and when the lancers were almost upon them, a rolling volley shattered their charge. One daring Frenchman, finding himself opposite the colour-party of the 44th, put spurs to his horse, drove his lance through the face of the ensign carrying the flag, and grasped the colour, but was promptly bayoneted. In that struggle, and in the close, fierce fighting of the day, Pack's brigade lost 800 men out of 2200.

At the crisis of the fight Ney found that his reserve, D'Erlon's column of 20,000 men, had slipped away from him. The story of how this fine body of troops marched and countermarched betwixt two battlefields, during the whole afternoon, and failed to fire a shot on either, is one of the most dramatic, and yet absurd, incidents of the day. A little after four o'clock an officer, riding at speed, brought to D'Erlon an order to march to the heights of St. Amand in order to storm Ligny. "You are about to save France," the order ran, "and cover yourself with glory." Napoleon was fond of addressing that

phrase about "saving France" to his generals. D'Erlon was to march "on" the height of St. Amand; but he understood it to mean "at" the height of St. Amand. Much may depend upon a preposition; and his misreading of the order took D'Erlon, not to the point where he would strike the flank of the Prussians, but to a point of junction with Napoleon's left wing. A copy of the order at the same time reached Ney, and, just when he most needed a strong force of infantry to support his cavalry, he found himself robbed of his reserve.

Since his infantry had gone everything depended upon his cavalry. As Houssaye tells the story, he rode to Kellerman and said in a broken voice, "The safety of France is at stake. . . . Take your cavalry, throw yourself into the midst of the English, crush them, and trample them under your feet." But to charge some 25,000 British and Dutch infantry with a single brigade of cuirassiers was a desperate feat. "Charge with what you have," Ney said, in reply to Kellerman's remonstrance; "crush them under your feet. Go, I tell you, go on."

Kellerman was too good a soldier to hesitate, but he was too shrewd a leader to give his men the chance to realise the desperate ride they had to face. "I used great haste," he said, in his report afterwards, "so as not to allow my men time to shrink, or to perceive the whole extent of the danger in front of them."

With blare of trumpets, brandished swords, and forward-pointing lances, the French cavalry galloped up the slope. Four battalions of Halkett's brigade stood in their path, and they fell into squares as the French came on them. The 69th was in the act of forming square when the Prince of Orange rode up and asked what they were about. "Preparing for the cavalry, sir," was the answer. "There is none within miles of you," he shouted; "deploy at once." The unfortunate regiment obeyed, and was in the act of deploying when suddenly the ridge in front grew dark with huge, straight-sworded, steel-clad horsemen, galloping at speed through the tangled corn. In a moment the regiment was wrecked, its colour was captured, and the exultant cuirassiers rode on, leaving 150 dead or dying men in the blood-splashed rye.

But the other squares stood firm. Picton, with characteristic daring, took the Royals and the 28th, in column, deep into the tumult of horsemen; then he suddenly flung them into squares. Again and again the French horse charged these steady quadrangles of bayonets and muskets. The wheat, at this point, was so deep that each square was almost buried in it, and the French resorted to the device of sending a single daring rider at the gallop to plant a lance in front of the square, its fluttering pennant serving as a signal to show the point on which they were to ride. Kellerman took his squadrons up

to the very apex of the triangle, but it became for them a double narrowing hedge of fire. A battery smote them in the front, while the British infantry on either flank rent them with dreadful volleys. That blinding, enveloping tempest of fire was intolerable. The cuirassiers wheeled, broke, and swept backwards; they carried with them the squadrons of lancers in their rear, and the tumult of maddened horses and flying men never pulled rein till Frasnes, two miles from the field, was reached. They broke through every body of troops they met on their flight.

The sun was setting when along the road from Nivelles came Cooke's division of the Guards, and with such fine troops in his hand Wellington's tactics instantly took a new shape. He had stood on the defensive all through the bitter fight; now he attacked. The light companies of Maitland's brigade were sent at the double to drive the French from the Bossu wood, and before their resolute advance the French skirmishers were swept back on their supports; and then skirmishers and supports alike were roughly tumbled out of the wood. Foy clung to the farmhouse of Gemioncourt for a while, but even that stubborn fighter at last had to yield.

By nine o'clock the sound of the battle died away. Ney's many attacks had failed, the British held exactly the position occupied in the morning; but the losses at Quatre Bras make a bit of very

dreadful arithmetic. The French killed and wounded amounted to 4375. Wellington's regiments suffered even more severely; 4659 were killed, wounded, and missing, and of these 2480 were British. The brigades of Pack and Kemp numbered 5063 when the fight began; of this number 1569 or almost every third man was hit. The Guards lost 554 of their number in the fight for the wood. These figures make it impossible to doubt the stern valour shown by both armies. Quatre Bras in the quality of endurance was a fitting prelude to Waterloo.

If any proof is needed of Wellington's amazing coolness in the tumult of battle it is found in a circumstance told by the writer of "The English Army in France." Wellington had been in the saddle since dawn. He was wearied; he knew that the battle was simply a question of endurance until his reserves came up, and he had unbounded faith in his regiments. And once, during the fierce fighting of Quatre Bras, the writer saw Wellington "lying quietly on the ground, with his hands clasped at the back of his head, and his eyes fixed on space, while officers came up incessantly bringing him news of the heavy fight; and in that position he gave the necessary orders." Amongst the troops that came up when night fell were some squadrons of cavalry under Ponsonby, who belonged to Wellington's circle of friends. Ponsonby tells how he found the Duke reading "some English newspapers which had just

reached him, and joking over their contents." That with Quatre Bras just fought, and Waterloo not forty-eight hours distant, Wellington should have found time to read London newspapers and laugh at London jokes, is a very astonishing example of his power of mental detachment.

Wellington himself tells a story illustrating the confusion and madness of the fight. He watched a regiment of French cuirassiers, some 600 or 700 strong, ride up the Charleroi road. The fire of infantry on their flank made them wheel, the leading files rode through a gateway that stood open, and the entire regiment followed, when they discovered there was no exit. They were caught as in a trap! "To my great surprise," says Wellington, "on looking again, about ten minutes afterwards, I saw them all rush out at full gallop through the gateway and returning along the very road by which they had come. The Frenchmen, finding that no attempt was made to hold the gate against them, quietly fell into order, waited a quarter of an hour, then rode out and escaped. Had we thought it possible they were there," says Wellington, "we might have captured every man without fail."

Meanwhile Napoleon had fought, and won, the battle of Ligny, a battle which for furious and sustained fighting is almost without parallel in the Napoleonic wars. It was not simply a contest of Celtic fire against Teuton stubbornness; there

was a flame of hate in both Frenchmen and Prussians as they wrestled together, and slew each other, in the narrow streets of Ligny, and round the blackened walls of St. Amand, which Celt and Teuton do not often carry into battle. The French were furious with the memory of the defeats of 1813 and the occupation of Paris. The Prussians were sullen not only with the memories of Jena and the capture of Berlin, but with the recollections of the oppression of French rule which had lain so long on all the cities and farms of Germany. The passions, in a word, of a score of battles broke into flame in that long struggle at Ligny.

The signal for the fight was given by the chiming of the bell, striking half-past two, in the church tower of St. Amand. That slow wave of peaceful sound, which for generations had meant the call to prayer, was answered by three quick-following shots from a French battery, and instantly the French columns, with loud-beating drums, moved. They were in the mood of battle, and were finely led, and gallantly met, on St. Amand. The story need not be repeated here of how Vandamme's men slew, and were slain, for three desperate hours, amid the burning houses of St. Amand; and how Gerard's men thrice carried the village of Ligny, and thrice were swept out of it, but won it with a fourth desperate charge, and kept it; but only when the narrow streets were choked with the

bodies of the slain, and the gutters ran red with their blood. At the end of that dreadful wrestle for Ligny there were no survivors but the victors.

The French won Ligny at last, not by the valour of their fighting—though that was of the finest quality—but by a stroke of generalship on the part of Napoleon. The strain and passion of the fight had reached their climax on the Prussian right wing, and Blucher flung battalion after battalion into the struggle at that spot, weakening by that his centre. Napoleon's sure vision watched the change in the aspect of the Prussian battle-line; he fed the contest on the Prussian right, but prepared to launch Milhaud's cuirassiers—the heavy cavalry of the Guard—on the Prussian centre. At the moment when he was about to fling this thunderbolt on the Prussian battle-line, there was discovered advancing from the direction of Quatre Bras a body of troops at least 20,000 strong. Vandamme, who sent the tidings to Napoleon, said they were British troops; he would be forced to abandon St. Amand unless Napoleon's reserve was launched against the approaching enemy. Vandamme, it seems, had sent an officer at speed to reconnoitre the approaching column, but he was too prudent to go within artillery range, and came back announcing it to be a force of the enemy. Napoleon suspended the attack on the Prussian centre: that menacing line of black creeping along the Namur road from Quatre Bras

was already spreading a panic through Vandamme's corps. French valour, if fierce, is soon chilled; and Houssaye says that Vandamme had to turn his guns upon some of his own divisions to prevent them rushing to the rear under the dread of this mysterious force which had made its appearance on their flank.

Napoleon sent an aide-de-camp to reconnoitre the approaching column, and at half-past six he returned with the news that it was D'Erlon's infantry corps, marching from Quatre Bras. Napoleon thus found a force of 20,000 fresh troops under his hand; but the amazing circumstance is that he made no use of it. Content to know that at least it was not an enemy's force, he apparently dismissed it from his mind, and became absorbed in the stroke which was to crush Blucher. A peremptory summons from Ney at the same moment reached D'Erlon, bidding him return, and D'Erlon obeyed that order, and turned his back on Ligny and marched to Quatre Bras, to find the battle ended there and the French defeated.

Napoleon now launched his reserves on the Prussian centre. They came on, a warlike torrent of men, the tall Grenadiers of the Old Guard, dragoons with shaggy helmets, Milhaud's cuirassiers clad in steel. The rain at that moment ceased, the clouds lifted, the rays of the western sun lay for a moment on the hills of Brye, and lit up such a scene of strife and slaughter as even great battle-

fields have not often seen. Blucher flung his remaining cavalry into the fight—a force of thirty-two squadrons—and himself rode on their flank as though he were a trooper. But the Old Guard were veterans; the Prussian horsemen broke upon them in vain. Then dragoons and cuirassiers rode in fierce counter-attack on the Prussian horse and wrecked them. Blucher's horse was shot, and fell upon its rider; his aide-de-camp sprang to the ground beside him. At that moment the French cavalry were thundering over the hill-slope, where Blucher lay, in pursuit of the broken Prussian squadrons. His aide-de-camp drew a cloak over Blucher till the tide of charging horsemen flowed over them, and ebbed back again; then hailing some Prussian dragoons, Blucher was dragged bruised and insensible from under his horse, and carried from the battlefield.

It seemed during the earlier stages of the fight at Ligny as if nothing could shake the obstinate, enduring courage of the Prussians; but the advance of the Old Guard was resistless, and Blucher's whole line fell sullenly back. They were beaten, but they were not broken; still less were they routed. The French held the field the Prussians had lost 12,000 men and twenty-one guns; but they had not lost their coherence as an army. No one knew where Blucher was at the moment, and the anxious divisional commanders were hanging on Gneisenau's

lips. As chief of staff he was in command. In the moonlight Gneisenau examined his map, and cried, "Retreat on Tilly and Wavre."

Wellington himself, who was not given to the use of superlatives, said of that brief sentence, spoken in the moonlight on the Brye road to a cluster of powder-blackened, anxious-faced Prussian officers, "It was the decisive moment of the century."

But did Gneisenau himself understand the full significance of that brief order? It must be remembered that the communications of the two armies diverged practically at right angles, that of the Prussians running eastward to Liége, and that of the British north to Antwerp. Each army could cling to its communications only by sacrificing its ally; and Gneisenau's brief sentence seemed to mean that the Prussians would sacrifice their communications to keep their touch with the British. This was certainly a great and courageous decision, if it did not quite mark "the decisive moment of the century."

But did Gneisenau mean all this? This may well be doubted. His first order was "Retreat on Tilly"; and from Tilly the Prussians could still have swung the heads of their columns to the right, and held on to their communications with Liége. But one of his listeners in the group on the road at Brye, after examining his map, objected that "Tilly was not marked on it." Then, Gneisenau added the words, "On Tilly and Wavre."

It was at Mellery, a little village a mile and a half north of Tilly, that the strategy which made Waterloo possible was debated and fixed; and it was Blucher, with his stubborn loyalty to his word, and the fighting impulse natural to his blood, who settled the question. Gneisenau was the thinking brain of the Prussian army, Blucher was its sword; and it was essential that brain and sword should agree. Hardinge was lying wounded—he had lost his arm—on a bundle of straw in the room which led to that Blucher occupied, and all night the Prussian generals were streaming in and out of Blucher's chamber, the debate raging in deep-throated gutturals. In the morning Blucher burst into Hardinge's room, crying, triumphantly, "Gneisenau has given way, we march to join Wellington."

But Gneisenau had meanwhile failed in one urgent and plain duty. He had sent no messenger to Wellington reporting the Prussian defeat, and the line on which they were falling back. The Prussians had simply vanished in the darkness. Not till nine o'clock the next morning did a staff officer arrive from Mellery with a verbal message from Muffling, giving the line of retreat, and asking what Wellington proposed to do. Gordon had been sent with a troop of the 10th Hussars in search of the Prussian army; he returned with the story of Ligny, and of the march of the Prussians on Wavre.

CHAPTER IV

THE RETREAT TO WATERLOO

"Had the opposing chief been still the general of Jena and of Ratisbon, the thunder of whose pursuit followed like an echo on the thunder of his battles, the English army would have been in extreme peril."—HAMLEY.

IT is profoundly interesting in the ampler light of to-day, and after the battle of critics has practically ceased, to look at the situation of the three armies on the morning of June 17. It was only forty-eight hours since Napoleon had cast aside the veil of secrecy which had hidden his movements, and crossing the Sambre, had committed himself to a definite strategy; yet, already, the issue of the campaign was certain. Two great battles had been fought. The Prussians were beaten at Ligny, and had fallen back in the darkness, with Blucher himself temporarily disabled, and leaving 12,000 men dead or wounded on the battlefield and twenty-seven guns in the hands of the victorious French. They had lost a great battle; but they had not lost cohesion or courage; and they had made a great strategical decision, the full meaning of which perhaps they did not themselves at the moment realise.

For it is always to be remembered that the mere decision to march on Wavre did not necessarily involve the surrender of their eastward communications. Thielman, for example, writes on the same night a letter which shows that he regarded Wavre as only a half-way house to Maestricht. Ligny therefore, for the Prussians, was only the first blow in the struggle, not its close. It did not dismiss them from the field.

Wellington had held his own at Quatre Bras. He had defeated Ney; his reserves were up. If his Peninsular army had been with him, as he told Baron Gurney years afterwards, "I should not have fought at Waterloo, I should have fought the battle at Quatre Bras." But he had not got his "Peninsular army." The Prussian army had been defeated, and had vanished; no news had reached him as to its course or plans. The last message from Ligny at eight o'clock on the night of the 16th reported that "all was well," and that Blucher was "about to assume the offensive." Then came silence. Not till 7.30 on the morning of the 17th did Wellington learn that the Prussian army had been defeated and was marching on Wavre. The story of the way in which Wellington took the news is classic. Captain Bowles was standing beside him when a Prussian staff officer, with sweating horse, galloped up, and in broken whispers, and with much agitation, told his tale in Wellington's

ear. Wellington listened without a change of countenance, and dismissed him. "Old Blucher," he then explained, "has had a —— good licking, and gone back to Wavre, eighteen miles off. As he has gone back we must go too. I suppose in England they will say we have been licked. I cannot help it; as they have gone back, we must go too."

But Wellington was in no hurry to retreat. He held on with a cool—not to say haughty—daring, in which might almost be read a certain note of contempt. He had Ney on his front and Napoleon on his flank; the Prussians had vanished temporarily from the landscape; but still Wellington kept his position. Only at ten o'clock did his infantry divisions begin to march off on the Brussels road northward, leaving the cavalry, with the infantry outposts and their supports as a screen, which effectually tricked the French.

But at Ligny Napoleon loitered—loitered in a manner which even to-day is inexplicable, and which moved the exasperated astonishment of his own troops. The mere record of the clock condemns him. He had sent no news to Ney about Ligny, and had no intelligence from Quatre Bras till seven o'clock on the 17th. At nine o'clock he set out for a leisurely inspection of the battlefield and of his troops. He was received with a tumult of shouts so loud that it was heard by the Prussian cavalry at Tilly, a circumstance which shows how near the

Prussians were, and how little their retreat had affected them. The Emperor was discussing the state of politics in Paris with his generals when he ought to have been marching at speed to crush Wellington, or hanging with his cavalry on the rear of the flying Prussians. At eleven o'clock Napoleon despatched part of his infantry and cavalry in the direction of Quatre Bras, and verbally committed the pursuit of the Prussians to Grouchy. At twelve o'clock he sent an order to Ney to attack the British at Quatre Bras, and then proceeded to drive in his carriage towards Quatre Bras himself, soon, however, taking to the saddle and awakening to energetic action. This was not the man of Arcola or of Austerlitz. "The Napoleon we have known no longer lives," said Vandamme.

Napoleon, in brief, was moving in a world of illusions. He believed that Wellington was falling back to Antwerp, Blucher towards Liége. The road to Brussels was open; a night march, he calmly assumed, would bring his columns into that city by dawn on the 18th.

And yet at that moment he was inflicting on himself the very disaster which it was the whole purpose of his strategy to inflict upon his enemies. He was dividing his army; and was doing this exactly when Wellington and Blucher had agreed upon a course which ensured the union of their forces. It is unnecessary here to discuss the exact

instructions given to Grouchy, and to assess the degree of blame which lies upon that unfortunate soldier for the wreck of Napoleon's fortunes. It is sufficient to note that Napoleon was dismissing 33,000 of his troops into space, and doing this within twenty-four hours of the time when he would find Wellington standing in his front, and Blucher moving on his flank. Perhaps no Prussian battery served its own flag better than that straggling cluster of guns which, on the morning of the 17th, Pajol, the most active of Napoleon's cavalry leaders, captured on the Namur road. It served to convince Napoleon that the whole of Blucher's army was flying in that direction.

Many ingenious excuses have been offered for Grouchy's fateful march from Ligny in a wrong direction; but no excuse is possible. The blame lies on Napoleon himself. That with 12,000 good cavalry under his hand he should lose sight and touch of a beaten army 70,000 strong, with its guns and its wounded, is sufficient to condemn him. It was a favourite maxim of Napoleon that "War is not a conjectural art"; but on the morning after Ligny he was acting on conjectures, and they were all wrong conjectures. That the allies had the advantage in strategy was clear. Both Blucher and Wellington moved from their respective battlefields undestroyed; they were retreating on concentric lines, and upon an agreed

plan, and every hour brought them nearer together. But when at noon on the 17th Napoleon despatched Grouchy with 33,000 men in the direction of Namur in pursuit of Blucher, he was dividing his forces, and every hour made the division more hopeless and more certainly fatal.

But in tactics, as well as in strategy, the allies had the advantage. The Prussians were showing better soldiership, for they were doing what Napoleon ought to have done and did not do; they were searching every country lane and forest track, every crevice of the country betwixt the Dyle and Lasne, with cavalry patrols. Grouchy's infantry did not reach Gembloux till nine o'clock at night: they had marched less than ten miles, and in the wrong direction. Blucher's columns, at the same hour, had marched twenty miles; and it was towards Wavre—and Waterloo. As a question of tactics, indeed, what is more conclusive than the fact that Wellington, with Ney in his front, and Napoleon on his flank, each within easy striking distance, yet evaded them both, and fell back to Waterloo in perfect order, and at no greater price than a cavalry skirmish?

It is, of course, an enduring reproach to Napoleon's generalship that no use was made of D'Erlon's corps at either Ligny or Quatre Bras. Many explanations have been made of that circumstance, but Wellington's question goes to the heart of the

matter. "What would they have said of me," he asked "if I had done that?" But the loss of D'Erlon, with 20,000 men, on June 16, was trifling compared with the loss of Grouchy with 33,000 on the 18th. That disaster to the French is not to be measured even by the absence of Grouchy's divisions in their battle-line. It cost, in addition, the withdrawal of more than 12,000 of Napoleon's reserves to hold Planchenoit against Bulow by five o'clock on the day of Waterloo. But for some irritating blunders, indeed, the Prussians would have been in battle-line at Waterloo at half-past two, with the result of an earlier and less bloody Waterloo, but one as utterly overwhelming in its wreck of Napoleon's fortunes. If Napoleon, in a word, was beaten in tactics at Waterloo on June 18, he was beaten almost as fatally both in tactics and strategy on the morning of the 17th.

Wellington's retreat to Waterloo was a fine example of good soldiership. He held on with great daring and coolness until past noon, when, along the Namur road, some moving patches of crimson colour were seen, and behind them points of glittering steel. The red lancers of the Guard and a brigade of cuirassiers were coming on. Wellington's cavalry outposts came in; his far-spread cavalry line resolved itself into columns; and, covered with the fire of his horse artillery, the British fell back along the Charleroi road.

Mercer, whose battery formed part of the British rear-guard, gives a very picturesque account of the retreat. Lord Uxbridge was in command of the British cavalry, and he was a sort of English Murat, with all the fire and dash of that famous cavalry leader. But he lacked coolness. The tumult and shock of battle acted as a kind of champagne upon him; it set his blood in a ferment, and he took risks a wiser soldiership would have avoided. Sitting on the limber of one of Mercer's guns, Uxbridge had been watching through his glass the approaching troops. He started up, exclaimed in a joyful tone, "By the Lord they are Prussians," jumped on his horse, and followed by two aides, dashed off like a whirlwind to meet them. Mercer watched him go, wondering with cooler brain how the Prussians came *there*. Then in a moment solid, menacing columns came into sight on the Namur road; the British piquets were galloping past on every side. The French were advancing, and Mercer and his guns were left without orders. In another moment Uxbridge came galloping fiercely up. "Mercer," he cried, "are you loaded? Give them a round as they rise the hill." Mercer watched the crest of the slope, his men standing with lighted matches waiting to fire. A huge storm was gathering; a whole continent of wind-driven, ink-black clouds filled the sky; Quatre Bras lay black in its shadow. Napoleon by this time

had realised that the British were slipping from his grasp, and was urging the retreat with fury, riding with the foremost guns. As it happened, brilliant sunlight lay on the hill in Mercer's front; the black, cliff-like clouds behind served as a background to it; and at that moment Mercer caught his first vision of Napoleon.

"A single horseman," he says, "followed by several others, came over the crest of the hill, their dark figures thrown forward in strong relief from the illuminated distance, making them appear much nearer to us than they really were. For an instant they pulled up and regarded us: when, several squadrons coming rapidly on the plateau, Lord Uxbridge cried out 'Fire! Fire!' and, giving them a general discharge, we quickly limbered up to retire, as they dashed forward, supported by some horse artillery guns, which opened upon us ere we could complete the manœuvre."

Just then the storm burst upon the landscape; the rain fell in continuous streams, the sky was shaken with the roll of thunder, and seemed on fire with lightning. Under the wrath of the skies the British guns galloped in retreat, while the cavalry rode at speed through the mud, and Lord Uxbridge galloped on their flank, crying "Faster! Faster! for God's sake, or you will be taken."

Gunners and horsemen streamed through the narrow streets of Genappe, and on the farther side Uxbridge turned to strike at his pursuers. The red Lancers were just issuing from the street and were formed across it, when Lord Uxbridge launched

the 7th Hussars at them. It was his own regiment, and he was suspected of having chosen them for this service as an act of favouritism. The Hussars rode gallantly enough to the charge; but they were light cavalry, with short swords; the Lancers stood in a solid mass, with their long lance-points forming a hedge of steel across the street. Their flank could not be turned; the street behind them was so packed that they could not retire, and though squadron after squadron of the Hussars rode in on that fringe of steel, they could not reach their enemies, and suffered much loss. The Hussars fell back, and Uxbridge, riding up to the 23rd Dragoons, ordered them to advance. He was in an impetuous mood, and hardly gave the 23rd time to obey. "My address to these light dragoons," he says, "not having been received with the enthusiasm I expected, I ordered them to clear the chaussée and said, 'the Life Guards shall have this honour.'"[1]

The Life Guards were accordingly sent at the Lancers, who by this time had broken out of the town, and were coming with exultant shouts up the slope. The Guards, terrible in scarlet and steel, rode in at speed upon them, the tall English horsemen riding over them and through them, and beyond them. The shattered Lancers were driven as by a whirlwind back into Genappe and through it.

[1] "Waterloo Letters," p. 6.

As the British fell back, the French cavalry once more broke through Genappe. Amongst the foremost was a mounted battery; beside it rode Napoleon. "His greatcoat," says Houssaye, "was soaked, water was streaming on to his boots, the clasps of his hat snapped under the violence of the rain, and the flaps had fallen over in front and behind." He had forgotten for the moment that he was an Emperor, and had become the artillery officer again. He superintended the place of the guns himself, calling to the gunners in accents of angry hatred, "Fire! Fire! These are the English."

But by this time rain of more than tropical violence was beating over the whole line of the retreat. The soft, far-spreading fields were mere stretches of mud, in which the horses floundered, knee-deep, sometimes girth-deep. The British held the paved road, and moved easily, and after Genappe there was practically no pursuit.

At half-past six Napoleon, with his advance squadrons, reached La Belle Alliance; the British outposts, seen dimly through rain and mist, were on the ridge at Mont St. Jean. Some French cavalry squadrons pushed across the valley, but were checked by a few sullen shots from the ridge. Napoleon doubted whether the British army was in front, and ordered the field batteries that were at hand to open fire. From half-a-dozen points in the misty gloom and the gathering night there came

answering flashes of red flame. Wellington had turned to fight.

All night long, through the darkness and across the muddy landscape, Napoleon's rain-whipped columns were gathering. They came wearily up, and at irregular intervals. Many divisions halted at Genappe. The Guard itself pushed on to reach the Imperial headquarters, but by midnight only two or three regiments had arrived. Other regiments had gone astray, and the men broke from their ranks, and wandered on plundering quests through the villages near.

Houssaye's description of the night from the French side makes melancholy reading. The troops, he says, "arrived in the darkness, worn out, streaming with water, hungry, some walking barefoot." They had lost their shoes in the viscid mud. They had to lie down in the stalks of rye a yard and a half in height, and drenched with rain; "it was like stepping into a bath." There were no fires; the commissariat waggons were not up, and the soldiers gathered in groups of ten or twelve, and slept standing, closely huddled against one another. Others lay down flat in the mud. The men were suffering from tortures of hunger. A scanty distribution of food to some of the regiments was made in the middle of the night, and again in the morning, but Napoleon's commissariat had plainly gone to pieces. The Old Guard, the iron

heart of the army, the flower of its discipline, were specially furious. "Their grumblers," says Houssaye, "never grumbled so loudly, or cursed their generals so fiercely." "'This smacks of treason,' they whispered to each other." It was a bad prelude to a day of battle.

Wellington had his headquarters in a room in the village of Waterloo. All night long his secretaries were busy about him; there was a constant flow of orderlies splashing in, dripping from the wet night, and splashing out again, with hurrying messages. He was settling all the details of a great battle. Napoleon had gone to bed in the farmhouse of Le Caillou, having first dictated the battle-plan for the morrow, as well as a number of letters to Paris, on whose fermenting politics he had to keep a vigilant eye. But he was restless. He could not, like Wellington, call sleep to his brain at will. At one o'clock he rose, and with General Bertrand as his only companion, splashed through the mud, the rain beating upon him, along the line of his outposts, till he reached Hougoumont, where a wood created a denser blackness in the black night.

A strange silence lay on the ridge where a great army was sleeping. The insistent splash of the falling rain in the darkness was the only sound to be heard, save when some slow-rolling thunder crashed in the starless sky. To the north—at the back of the English ridge—stretched the forest of

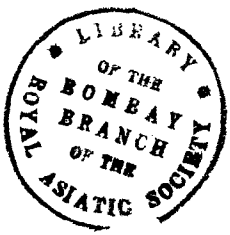
Soignies. It was pricked with camp fires, and their red glare gave the trees almost the aspect of a burning forest.

It must be a dull imagination that is not stirred by the thought of that figure of Napoleon in the midnight rain, listening, with bent head, at the foot of the long, dark ridge on which his foes were sleeping—a ridge made darker by what seemed a wall of burning forest beyond it. It was the eve of the last of all Napoleon's battles.

While Napoleon was returning from that midnight excursion, an orderly rode into Wellington's headquarters, bringing the final pledge of assistance from Blucher. "Bulow's corps," the message ran, "will set off marching at daybreak in your direction. It will be immediately followed by the corps of Pirch; the 1st and 3rd Corps also will hold themselves in readiness to proceed towards you." Wellington must have been reading that message at the very moment when Napoleon stood, with bent head, in the darkness and the rain, listening for any sound which might show that his enemies were retreating. When Napoleon reached the farmhouse where he was to sleep, he, too, found a letter waiting him. It was from Grouchy, and had been written at Gembloux, at ten o'clock the previous evening, and reported that the Prussians seemed to be withdrawing in two columns, one towards Ligny, the other towards Wavre. "If the bulk of the Prussians

retire on Wavre," wrote Grouchy, "I shall follow them in that direction, that they may not be able to reach Brussels, and to separate them from Wellington."

Thus both Wellington and Napoleon at almost the same moment received messages, equally reassuring, from the distant forces whose help they required; and these two documents, no doubt, powerfully influenced events on the following day. Had they been of a different character, the battle of Waterloo would have worn a different aspect, or even might not have been fought at all. But Blucher's pledge was based on facts, and was kept. Grouchy's letter was in quarrel with the facts, and betrayed Napoleon's hopes.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CHAPTER V

THE TWO ARMIES

"Waterloo did more than any battle I know of towards the object of all battles, the peace of the world."—WELLINGTON.

UNDER the moist grey skies of the early morning on June 18, there came to the ridge on which the British army was waking the faint call of bells. It was Sunday; and, true to ancient habitude, the churches were calling their tiny flocks to prayer. The rain had fallen all night, and was still falling softly; and through the air, heavy with mist, could be seen tiny villages with church steeples showing above the poplars, farmhouses set in orchards. Rain-drops lay thick on the bearded grain, there were tiny pools of water in every hollow. Many of the British troops had reached the ridge on which they stood late at night, and they now looked round with curious eyes on what was to be one of the most famous of all earthly battlefields.

It seemed at first sight to lend itself ill to the purpose of battle. Picton, who was one of the best fighters in both armies, and knew the iron grammar of battle better than most men, said, an hour before

the actual fighting began, "I have just ridden along the whole line, and I never saw a worse position." It was certainly no Busaco. That gentle slope on which Picton looked with disgust, and up which a horse might gallop, was very unlike that cliff-like wall of granite down which he had seen Masséna's columns swept in wreck and defeat. Yet the position at Waterloo suited Wellington's method sufficiently well. It was a low, slightly curving ridge. The slope looking towards the French was a natural glacis, and an attacking force would be searched by gun-fire at every step. On the right, thrust out like a bastion from a castle, was Hougoumont, an old château built for war, as the ancient loopholes in its walls showed. A solid brick wall served as a shield to the house; house and wall were set in a frame of orchards, and there was a belt of forest on two fronts. It was a field-fortress, a quarter of a mile on each face, covered with a screen of foliage. The fire from the windows commanded the orchard, the fire from the orchard swept the wood, and the muskets in the wood would make approach from the ridge deadly. It stood some 500 yards in advance of the ridge which the British held; its garrison could be easily reinforced, and the British guns swept it on three sides, and made attack difficult.

The ridge ebbs back at its centre where the great road from Charleroi crosses it, offering an easy

approach to the guns of an attacking force. But 300 yards from the crest of the ridge, on the west side of the road, stood a second "bastion" almost as strong as Hougoumont. It was La Haye Sainte, a solidly built house, forming three sides of a quadrangle, the fourth side—facing the Charleroi road—consisting of a high wall. South of the buildings was an orchard, to the north was a garden. On the opposite side of the road was an old sand-pit and a cluster of trees, making good cover for a strong musketry party. Thus approach on the Charleroi road, gripped at the same point bewixt two such formidable defences, would be very costly for an attacking force. Farther east, Papelotte and La Haye, tiny clusters of houses, formed good advanced posts.

Along the crest of the ridge, running east and west through its whole extent, was the Wavre road. Where it intersected the Charleroi road it ran through a deep cutting, making a formidable ditch; where it ran level with the surface it was screened by a dense hedge. The reverse of the ridge was steep in descent, and lent itself admirably to Wellington's trick—so disconcerting to his foes—of keeping his reserves out of sight, and only producing them at the moment they were needed.

The Charleroi road reaches the ridge from the south; the Nivelles road approaches from the south-west; after crossing the Wavre road, it reaches

and joins the Charleroi road, forming a tiny triangle, with a section of the Wavre road for a base, and the Charleroi and Nivelles roads for its containing sides. And in this triangle, hidden out of sight of the French ridge, Wellington placed his chief reserves.

It may be added that the position at Waterloo exactly suited the fighting qualities of the army that stood in battle-line upon it. It was not a manœuvring army. At least one-third of the British troops upon it had never heard a shot fired in battle; they were militia drafts with only militia training. They had the fighting qualities of their stock, and Wellington himself said afterwards of them, "It is wonderful how those recruits stood." "The best troops we had at Waterloo," Wellington on another occasion told Ellesmere, "were almost all second battalions scarcely out of the goose-step. They stood and hammered away as well as the oldest, but it would have been very hazardous to have manœuvred with them under fire as with the old Peninsulars."

For stubborn, long-enduring valour, indeed, no troops that ever stood in the battle-line surpassed the British soldiers at Waterloo. But they had not the qualities of old soldiers. They could stand in squares, while for two dreadful hours Ney's cavalry—lancers and cuirassiers—rode round them, and never quail. They could close their ranks under the fiery tempest of the French guns without complaint. But if the squares that stood on the

ridge at Waterloo for those tremendous hours had been put to the test, say, of the Light Division at Fuentes, and had to cross miles of open plain with French cavalry threatening them on every side, they probably would have dissolved in the process.

Wellington's front was composed of nine infantry brigades, numbering with their supports from 23,000 to 25,000 men—parallelograms of red and blue, with too few red and too many blue. His advance-posts in all consisted of 6000 men; he had 6800 cavalry in his second line, and 22,000 men in his reserves. Many of his British troops were still wearing their militia uniform. The Hanoverians and Brunswickers, 17,000 in all, were newly raised and half disciplined; the Dutch-Belgians and Nassaus, over 20,000 strong, were of doubtful—in some instances of worse than doubtful—loyalty. It was, perhaps, the composite character, and the half-disciplined quality of many of his battalions which inspired those bitter epithets with which in later years Wellington was accustomed to describe the army that won Waterloo. "It was," he said, "the worst equipped army with the worst staff ever brought together. "The worst army," he told Palmerston, "that had ever been got together." "I never saw such a set of boys, both officers and men," was the comment of one disgusted general after inspecting a battalion of the 14th. Fourteen officers and 300 men were below twenty years of age. "An

infamously bad army," Wellington repeated long afterwards, "and the enemy knew it. But," he added, on reflection, "it beat them." "Had I had had at Waterloo," he said, on another occasion, "the army that broke up at Bordeaux, I should have swept him [Napoleon] off the face of the earth in two hours."

Wellington's army thus was of dangerously composite materials. Out of 67,661 troops only 23,991 were British; the King's German Legion, equal in military value to the British, numbered 5824; 20,664, or nearly one-third of the entire force, were Dutch-Belgians. Many of these were sufficiently good fighters; but many were French in sympathy; many had served in Napoleon's army; some, indeed, still wore French uniform. Wellington could not depend upon their loyalty. He tells how he saw some of these troops "running off at Waterloo, and, what is more, firing upon us as they ran." [1] Only once as he rode along the ridge during the fight did his staff persuade him to change his course. He was about to pass in front of some Dutch-Belgian battalion, and they might fire upon him instead of upon the French! Was ever a general in more cruel position than to be required to fight a great battle with an army of which nearly one-third was of doubtful loyalty! Wellington himself said afterwards, "I had only about 35,000 men on whom I could rely. . . . If I had the same army as in the

[1] Stanhope, p. 299.

south of France the battle would have been won in three hours."

Now, in a chess-play of manœuvres, with Napoleon on the other side of the board, such an army would certainly have come to disaster. A plain "pounding" match suited both its virtues and its defects best. And Waterloo was exactly such a pounding match. Napoleon's tactics lent themselves to that style of battle, and this to a degree which disgusted even Wellington, who profited by it. "Why," he said, while the battle was in progress, "he is only a pounder after all."

If the ridge on which the British stood suited Wellington's methods, the opposite ridge suited those of Napoleon. It had no valley in its rear; it rose a gentle, continuous slope, with La Belle Alliance at its centre, and supplied a perfect stage for the display and evolutions of the entire French army. Napoleon, who perfectly understood the French genius, with its excellencies and its limitations, was accustomed to appeal to the imagination of his soldiers through their senses. A sonorous proclamation stirred their blood; vivid contrasts of tint in their equipments delighted their colour-sense; the vision of the entire army ranked for battle stimulated their daring by a sort of contagion. So on the long upward sloping ridge at La Belle Alliance Napoleon was able, by way of preface to the battle, to set his whole army in rank, and reveal it, in a sense, to itself.

When taking up its position for the battle it came down the slope in eleven columns, each column with guns on its flank; in their rear, with far-heard clash of sabre on stirrup, came the cavalry—lancers, dragoons, cuirassiers; a hundred bands filled the air with the tumult of their music. Thiers says that the army thus displayed resembled a great outspread fan, and, like a fan, narrowing as it ran back, each of the eleven columns being one of its sticks. It was a many-tinted "fan," and edged through every line, and at every joint, with steel.

The spectacle it offered was very French, and very picturesque—a flame of variegated uniforms; and Houssaye lingers over the details with the delight Turner might have shown over the tints of a sunset. He catalogues infantry in blue coats, with white breeches and gaiters; the cavalry, a rainbow dance of colours; chasseurs in bright green jackets with facings of purple; cuirassiers with plumes on their shakos, each regiment of a different tint—sky-blue, scarlet, grey; dragoons, with brass casques and purple helmets of tiger skin; light lancers in green, with sheep-skin shabracks, and helmets with silken cords; cuirassiers with white breeches, top-boots, steel helmets, with crests of copper and floating horse-hair manes. The carabineers, "giants of six feet, were clad in white with breastplates in gold and tall helmets, with red cords like those worn by the heroes of antiquity." Then come the cavalry of

the 3rd Line, dragoons in green coats faced with white, scarlet plumes in their helmets; grenadiers in blue coats, faced with scarlet, and high caps of bear-skin, with plumes of hanging cords; lancers red, blue, and yellow, with red caps brass-plated, and surmounted by white plumes half a yard long. As far as the eye could reach, men, horses, and guns were moving in disciplined bodies, and, furthest of all, the dark solid columns of the Old Guard, their grenadiers distinguished by their greater height and the plate on their bear-skins.

As an amusing detail, the Guard carried in the knapsacks their parade uniforms, in readiness for their triumphal entrance into Brussels—a melancholy waste of ineffective care.

When this wonderful human "fan" was spread out complete, suddenly along its outer fringe shot at speed a group of horsemen, with wind-blown plumes, and uniforms rich in gold and scarlet. It was Napoleon and his staff; and as he rode past the heads of his columns a tempest of shouts broke out. It pursued him, it ran before him. It was, though he knew it not, his last review, and that great shout was the last greeting a French army was ever to give to him.

That sustained tempest of human sound swept over to the British ridge, and amongst the British infantry soldiers was answered with many a rough jest. But at one sensitive point in the line it was as

effective as a blast of guns. Wellington had placed at Hougoumont two battalions of Dutch-Belgian troops, and the sound of that "Vive l'Empereur!" coming from La Belle Alliance, visibly shook them. It was not that the menace of the tremendous shout shook their courage—for they were good soldiers—but the appeal of "Vive l'Empereur!" shook their loyalty. Wellington rode down and amongst them, and tried to steady them, but in vain, and as he rode away several discharged their muskets at him. It might almost be said that the first shots fired on the British ridge at Waterloo were fired, not at the French, but, by some of the troops under his own command, at Wellington! Wellington withdrew these battalions from Hougoumont, saying bitterly, "It is with such troops as these I have got to win the battle." Yet they were good troops; they had marched and fought under the French flag all through the Peninsula. "I knew them well," said Wellington, "for I had followed them from the Tagus to the Pyrenees; they were always in the French rear-guard, and no men could behave better." But the sight and the sound of Napoleon's army simply swept them away.

It remains to be added that if the French position at Waterloo suited Napoleon, curiously enough it exactly suited Wellington too. It made impossible any concealment either of the strength of the French army, or of its tactics. Wellington could see dis-

tinctly every galloping aide-de-camp carrying orders; he could watch the concentration of batteries, the falling-in of columns, for each attack. As far as tactics went, he resembled a player whose cards are concealed, while those of his opponent are open. There were many surprises waiting for the French when, in their attacks, they reached the British ridge; but the French attacks themselves had no surprises for Wellington. He could watch them gathering, measure their force and volume, guess the exact point at which they were directed, and vary the arrangement of his troops to meet the attack. And it was in this branch of generalship—in the perfect recollection of the forces under his command, and the instant decision as to their use—that Wellington excelled. Ney, who practically directed nearly all the actual fighting at Waterloo, was apt, in the fury of the conflict, to forget the forces at his disposal. There are astonishing instances of such forgetfulness in his conduct of the battle. He forgot to supplement the cavalry charges with infantry and guns; he forgot to cover the flanks of the Old Guard with cavalry as they advanced on the British lines. What he forgot, of course, Napoleon ought to have remembered, but did not. But Wellington forgot nothing. He made effective use of his forces to the last file and the last cartridge.

At Waterloo, exactly as at Ligny, and as on the day after Ligny, Napoleon loitered, and the moments,

on each of which hung such tremendous issues, were allowed to slip through his fingers in a manner which still is the perplexity of all critics. He had proposed to begin the battle at nine o'clock, but at that hour his divisions were not in their places. Reille's corps had scarcely reached Le Caillou; some of D'Erlon's divisions were not in sight; Kellerman's heavy cavalry were splashing through the mud far in the rear. The ground, after so many hours of rain, was too soft for either infantry or guns to manœuvre. But these circumstances do not explain why Napoleon waited till 11.50 before firing the first shot.

At his breakfast that morning Napoleon discussed with his principal officers the coming struggle. He was fond of translating his calculations into what may be called gambling terms. "The British army," he said, "is superior to ours by more than one-fourth." This, of course, was a mistake. "We have, nevertheless," he went on, "ninety chances in our favour, and not ten against us." At that moment Ney entered. He had been visiting the outposts, and he told Napoleon that his calculation was no doubt correct "provided Wellington be simple enough to wait for you. But I must inform you, sire," he added, "that his retreat is decided, and that if you do not hasten to attack the enemy he is about to escape you." "You have seen wrong," said Napoleon. "It is too late now, Wellington would

expose himself to certain loss; he has thrown the dice, and it is in our favour."

But round that table sat men who were familiar with a British army and its fighting qualities. They knew, too, Wellington's qualities as a general. They had played the great game of war with him, with the Peninsula as a chess-board, through five campaigns. Soult was uneasy, and hinted that Grouchy's force would be badly needed that day in battle. "Because you have been beaten by Wellington," said Napoleon, "you consider him a great general. And now I tell you that Wellington is a bad general, that the English are bad troops, and that this affair is only *un déjeuner*." It was to prove a very indigestible "*déjeuner*" for Napoleon.

Later Reille came in, and Napoleon asked his opinion of the British army. Reille was a good soldier, with memories of many uncomfortable experiences in the Peninsula.

"Well posted, as Wellington knows how to post it, and, attacked from the front," said Reille, "I consider the English infantry to be impregnable owing to its calm tenacity and its superior aim in firing. Before attacking it with the bayonet one may expect half the assailants to be brought to the ground. But it is less agile, less expert in manœuvring than ours. If we cannot beat it by direct attack, we may do so by manœuvring."

According to another version of the story given by Houssaye, Reille evaded a reply, and was reproached by D'Erlon afterwards and urged to go back to the Emperor and give his opinion. "What is the use?"

said Reille. "He will not listen to us." According to Houssaye, Napoleon replied, "I know the English are difficult to beat in position, that is why I am going to manœuvre." As a matter of fact, of course, he did not manœuvre. But the whole story illustrates Napoleon's obstinate habit of taking his wishes for facts, of believing only what it was convenient to believe. He had never seen the English since he was an artillery officer at Toulon. He comes, indeed, into history, in a sense, and he disappears from it, at the point at which he touches the English. His fame began when he opened fire with his guns on the British ships at Toulon, and his career ended in the smoke of Waterloo. A very wide interval in events, if not in time, parts Toulon from Waterloo, but Napoleon had learned nothing himself about the English in the interval, and he was unwilling to learn anything from his generals.

One fact, had he known it, would have made that waste of hours on the morning of Waterloo impossible. In the low wooded hills on Napoleon's right, not ten miles distant, Blucher, with 90,000 men, was forcing his way with obstinate toil along the muddy cross-roads and the swollen streams to fall on Napoleon's flank. Wellington knew this; it was the essential factor of his plans. He stood to fight at Waterloo because he knew Blucher would come into the fight. Napoleon might have known it too; he ought to have known it. Since he knew that the Prussians

had fallen back on Wavre he ought to have searched with his light cavalry all the country betwixt Wavre and Waterloo. But he did nothing. He believed that Grouchy would either arrest Blucher's march by falling on his rear and forcing him to turn to bay, or would intercept it by crossing the head of his columns.

But at that very moment Grouchy was placidly eating strawberries in a little garden at Walhain, twenty-two miles distant. "Now," as Houssaye reflects, "eating strawberries, even on the morning of a battle, is not in itself a hanging matter," but that Grouchy should be eating strawberries at Walhain when he was so sorely needed at Waterloo might almost be described as "a hanging matter." Before his strawberries were finished, Grouchy was listening to faint, far-off pulses of sound that seemed to creep through the warm air. His chiefs of divisions pricked their ears at it. Some knelt down with their ears to the ground and tried to guess its direction. It was the sound of the opening guns at Waterloo. The peasant who stood there as a guide said, "The battle is at Mont St. Jean." Gerard interpreted a soldier's duty by saying, "We ought to march to the guns." But Grouchy made the choice which, perhaps, did not seriously affect events at Waterloo, but which will make his name a hated sound in French ears for all time. He determined, with pedantic obstinacy, that he must carry out the

letter of Napoleon's instructions, and follow the Prussian. If Napoleon had known that, instead of discussing with his generals the "worthlessness" of the British army, he would have tried to demonstrate that worthlessness by energetically and promptly attacking it.

CHAPTER VI

WATERLOO: I.—HOUGOUMONT AND THE GREAT INFANTRY ATTACK

"Now I tell you that Wellington is a bad general, that the English are bad troops, and that this affair is only *un déjeuner*."
—NAPOLEON, *on the morning of Waterloo.*

THERE is much debate as to the exact moment the battle began. Some give the hour at eight in the morning, some as late as twelve. The first shot was fired at Hougoumont, from a battery on the French left, and Captain Diggell, a cool old officer of the Peninsula, took out his watch, turned to his subaltern officer, Gawler, and quietly remarked, "There it goes." It was twenty minutes past eleven. Hill, a soldier as methodical and cool, records that he, too, consulted his watch as the sound of the first gun from the French position rolled suddenly across the valley, and gives it as 11.50. The watches did not agree.

A glimpse of Wellington before the battle began is given by Sir Harry Smith. Lambert, with his division of 3500 troops, reached Waterloo when all the troops were in position, and Sir Harry Smith was sent forward to learn Wellington's orders.

"When I rode up, he said, 'Hallo, Smith, where are you from last?' 'From General Lambert's brigade, sir, and they from America.' 'What have you got?' 'The 4th, the 27th, and the 40th; the 81st remain in Brussels.' 'Ah, I know, I know; but the others, are they in good order?' 'Excellent, my lord, and very strong.' 'That's all right, for I shall soon want every man.' One of his staff said, 'I do not think they will attack to-day.' 'Nonsense,' said the Duke. 'The columns are already forming, and I think I have discerned where the weight of the attack will be made. I shall be attacked before an hour.'"[1]

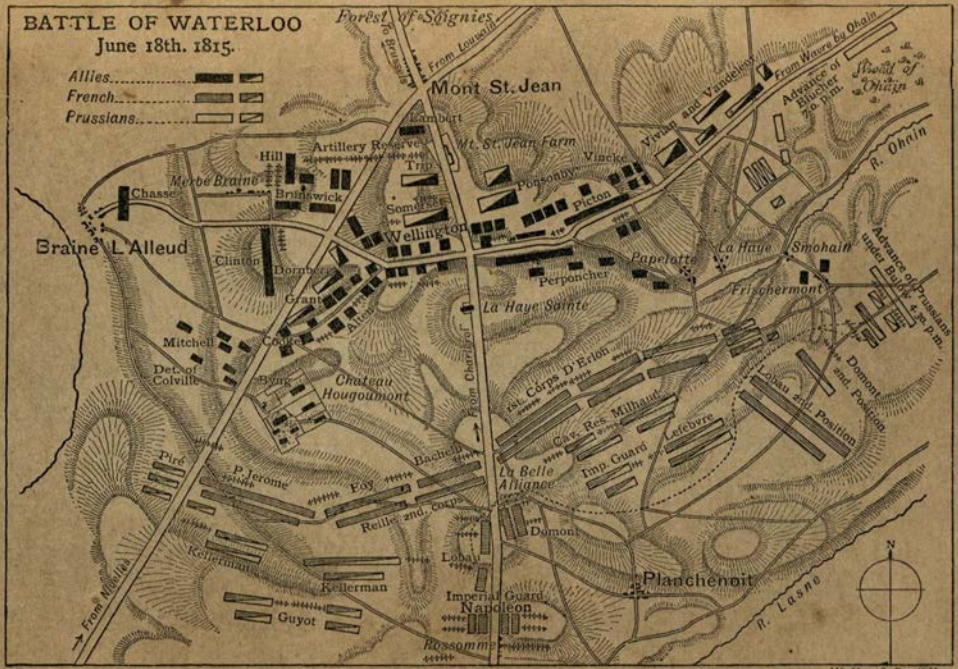
Wellington proceeded to tell Smith in his blunt, short-worded fashion where his division was to be placed. It was to be in the triangle betwixt the Nivelles and Charleroi roads, and in the rear of the Nassau brigade. Wellington went on to explain that he would almost certainly need Lambert in the fight at a particular point of the line, at that moment held by a Hanoverian brigade. Smith was to find out the best and shortest road to that exact point, so as to be ready to conduct the division to it. "Wellington," Smith says, "was in high spirits, but so cool and so clear in his orders that it was impossible not to fully comprehend what he said." Late in the afternoon there came the order to move to the very spot where Wellington,

[1] "Autobiography of Sir Harry Smith," vol. i. p. 268.

early in the morning, had guessed they would be required.

Napoleon's plan of attack had no subtlety in it. He proposed to repeat on Wellington the tactics which had deceived and defeated Blucher at Ligny. In that battle he had attacked the Prussian right, and ingeniously fed the attack, watching Blucher drain his centre of troops to meet it. Then he launched his cavalry at the weakened centre, broke through, and wrecked the Prussian army. His plan, at Waterloo, was to attack Hougoumont, hoping that Wellington would repeat Blucher's mistake, and weaken his centre, to hold his right. Then a tremendous infantry attack was to be launched on the British ridge at what he imagined would be its weakest point, immediately to the east of the Charleroi road.

But Wellington was too cool a soldier to be caught in that trap. He had placed in Hougoumont the light companies of two battalions of the Guards under Macdonnell, a tall Scottish soldier whose fighting gifts Wellington knew to be of the toughest quality. The garrison of 1200 men included a Nassau battalion and a company of Hanoverians. These latter proved unequal to the fierce strain of fighting about Hougoumont, and had to be withdrawn. But the fighting quality of the Coldstreams was of a stubborn, enduring fibre, which proved equal to the task of holding Hougoumont against troops



Walker & Boutall sc.

with French fire and dash, and outnumbering them nearly tenfold.

Jerome's division began the attack on Hougoumont, and his skirmishers ran forward gallantly. They came down the slope, broke into the wood on its southern face, and swept round its western front, driving the Nassauers and Hanoverians before them. Thirteen battalions were engaged in the attack. Foy, a little later, took the whole of his division against the right of the wood, and the French forced their way through trees and thickets with a tumult of shouts. They believed they had carried the position. Suddenly, through the green of the tall hedge, they saw the dull red of the brick wall to the south of the garden, and in a moment it was pricked with points of red flame along its whole extent. The Guards were firing through the loopholes, and at the same moment a battery of howitzers from the British ridge poured a tempest of shells on wood and garden. The French were shaken, and the Guards, charging out of the orchard, drove them back into the wood. But Foy with new battalions attacked the southern front, Jerome with his divisions the south-western front, and the Guards were driven back foot by foot till they held only the flanks of the château and garden. Some of the French broke through the orchard by a gap in the hedge, but were charged with the bayonet by Lord Saltoun's companies and driven back. Another

stream of French drove the Guards from the back of the house to the farmyard by the northern entrance. The lane, the kitchen garden, the ravine on the west were now crowded with the exultant French. Some of them broke through the hastily barricaded gate, and for a moment it seemed as if Hougoumont was to be carried. Macdonnell himself, however, with the aid of three officers and a sergeant, slew the foremost French and closed the gate again.

The French showed splendid pluck. Their skirmishers pushed up the hill through the rye, towards the ridge beyond Hougoumont, till they were lying within pistol-shot of a battery of guns there, and threatened to silence it with their musketry. Wellington sent Woodford with four companies of the Guards to sweep back this venomous swarm, and Woodford not only cleared the slope, but pushed down to Hougoumont itself and took his companies into the farm and strengthened its garrison. Nothing could surpass the persistency and daring of the French attack, except the cool and obstinate valour of the defence. Saltoun's companies were still holding the orchard, but seeing them hard pressed, Wellington sent down a couple of companies of the Guards to their relief.

All day long the fight ebbed and flowed round Hougoumont. Thrice the attack was repeated with new fury by the French, and Bachelu's division was

drawn into the struggle. The stables were set on fire by French shells, and some of the British wounded perished in the flames. The smoke of the burning building swept in low black clouds eastward across the whole British front. But the Guards themselves held on to their post with the flame of the burning roof above their heads; and at the close of the day, when the smoke-blackened and weary survivors of the Coldstreams came up the slope to join their regiments on the ridge, Barnes, running forward, shouted with enthusiasm, "You are heroes!" And as night fell, and the broken French army in all the tumult of defeat was flying in confusion towards Genappe, Wellington, riding amongst his wasted and victorious troops, caught sight of Muffling. "Well, you see," he cried, "Macdonnell held Hougoumont after all!"

The attack on Hougoumont cost the French dearly. Wellington himself tells how, only a short time after the attack had begun, he noticed a long column of men falling back from the wood towards the French position. He was puzzled by the sight, and at last, looking through his glass, discovered it was a column of wounded at least 1000 strong. "The French," he said, "must have lost at least 1000 men killed and wounded in the first three-quarters of an hour." But Hougoumont cost Napoleon very much more than can be expressed in the number of men killed and wounded

in the attack. It was not simply that the attack failed; it inflicted on Napoleon the very injury it was intended to inflict on Wellington. It drew into an irrelevant and resultless adventure almost the whole of his left wing. A force of little over 1200 Guards found occupation for more than 12,000 good French infantry. And the attack on Hougoumont supplies the earliest proof of that strange feature of the battle—Napoleon's loss of command over his own army. The attack on Hougoumont was never intended to be pressed; but when once the fight began it was found impossible to check it. Reille's order—to keep in the hollow behind the wood, and maintain in front a strong line of skirmishers—was repeated again and again, but in vain. The chief of Jerome's staff tried, without effect, to put a stop to the useless attack. Reille, and Napoleon himself later, tried to call off Jerome, and tried in vain. Reille's corps was to take part in the great infantry attack on the British centre. It was to advance at the same time, and to keep pace, with D'Erlon's corps; but these orders were not carried out. "Reille," says Houssaye, "preoccupied with the diversion on Hougoumont, neglected that completely." Jerome, in brief, was doing in the first stage of the fight what Ney did at the time of the great cavalry attacks. He was "compromising" Napoleon; he was wrecking his line of battle.

All this, we repeat, is a proof of the most curious feature of Waterloo, the loss by Napoleon of what may be called tactical grip upon his army. He sat at a table in the open air at La Belle Alliance watching the fight; sometimes he fell asleep. His figure scarcely emerges in the smoke of the fight till late in the evening, when the Old Guard was preparing to attack. Ropes explains Napoleon's lack of control over the tactics of the fight by saying that he was preoccupied during the afternoon with the battle against the Prussians on his flank; but the story of Lobau's obstinate struggle with Bulow at Planchenoit gives no hint of Napoleon's personal interference. Of Wellington's staff, forty strong, all but two were killed or wounded. Napoleon's staff escaped with little injury, a fact which shows which general took the most active personal share in the fight.

The French army at Waterloo might almost be described, in a word, as a body with huge and powerful limbs, but with no sufficient nervous system co-ordinating them, and making them the instruments of a single brain. The British army was weaker than the French, if only because composed of such diverse elements; but Wellington's personality dominated it from the first shot that was fired. His touch was felt at every point, in every detail, and all the day. All the fighting resources of his army were utilised to the highest

point. It never ceased to reflect his purpose, and to answer every impulse of his will.

Meanwhile Napoleon was preparing, after his familiar method, to crush the centre of the British line. He concentrated his batteries in front of La Belle Alliance—twenty-four 12-pounders, and some batteries of 8-pounders—and to these he added three batteries of the Guard, making the whole artillery attack heavier than he had first planned. Apparently by this time he realised that the British were not quite the "bad soldiers," nor Wellington the "bad general," he had imagined they were, and the affair was not to be "merely *un déjeuner*." The guns were in position, the gunners with live matches standing by their pieces; but before giving the signal to open fire Napoleon swept with his glass the whole British line. Hougoumont was in flames to his left, black clouds of smoke drifting low from it across the British line. To the right, from La Haye Sainte to the hedges and ravines of Papelotte and La Haye, ran an unbroken line of angry skirmishing. Directly opposite the British ridge seemed naked. Picton had withdrawn his brigades, and made them lie down, in preparation for the tempest of shot he knew was about to break on the ridge. All the French could see was a few batteries and some clusters of mounted officers. And on that almost naked ridge eighty guns, from a distance of perhaps not more than 600 yards, were about to

concentrate their fire, and at least 18,000, perhaps 20,000, infantry stood in four black massive columns ready to sweep upon it. Flame and steel—the flame of eighty guns, and the bayonets of nearly 20,000 infantry—all directed upon what seemed an empty ridge! But behind that low crest, lying flat on the ground, were 3000 British infantry—Picton's brigades, wasted with the slaughter of Quatre Bras.

At that moment Napoleon turned his glass to the east. A tiny blot of colour could be seen moving on the edge of the Lambert woods. His staff declared it was only the drifting shadow of a cloud, or some thicker cluster of trees shaken by the wind. But Soult's keen and practised eye recognised a body of troops, part of which had piled their arms. Was it the Prussians or Grouchy? While the staff doubted and debated, a cavalry piquet brought in a Prussian hussar, who had been captured carrying a letter from Bulow to Wellington, announcing the arrival of the 4th Corps. Napoleon who, says Houssaye, "easily deluded himself by his own fancies," decided that it was only a Prussian detachment; that Grouchy must be on its rear, or even perhaps was outmarching it to join him. He despatched a letter to Grouchy, "Do not lose a moment to draw near us and join us, and crush Bulow whom you will take, *flagrante delicto*." "This morning," he said to Soult, "we had ninety odds in our favour, we still have sixty against

forty, and if Grouchy repairs the terrible fault he has made . . . and marches rapidly, our victory will be all the more decisive, for Bulow's corps will be completely destroyed." The unfortunate Grouchy, it will be seen, was already being held responsible for the misfortune of his being at Walhain instead of at Waterloo.

It was now half-past one, and the massed batteries in front of La Belle Alliance commenced to thunder at the British ridge, the English guns gallantly answering. At two o'clock the French artillery suddenly fell silent, and the great infantry attack began. Four huge columns moved out in echelon, with left advanced. The Allix column led, the columns of Donzelot, Marcognet, and Durutte followed, with an interval of 400 yards betwixt each echelon. The front of each column was narrow, the depth great. Ney on the Charleroi road, with D'Erlon at his side, led the assault. The leading column took the left of the road, the others the right; some light batteries moved with them, a strong force of cuirassiers rode on their left flank.

A French column in attack is a very noisy body, and these four huge masses came on with a loud clamour of voice, and the roll of many drums—a far-running tumult of sound. But the soft soil made marching heavy and slow. From the British ridge came no sound except the crash of the guns firing swiftly and steadily at that great moving human

target. Picton's infantry as they lay on the grass grasped their muskets more firmly. Jest and gossip ceased. Their skirmishers knelt on one knee with muskets thrown forward. Suddenly the tempest of artillery on the French ridge slackened; it died into silence; the shouts of the coming French—almost the sound of their trampling feet —could be heard. The leading column eddied like a flood round La Haye Sainte, and swept Baring's Germans, who formed its garrison, from the garden and hedges. Bylandt's brigade, placed in advance on the southern slope of the hill, had been shaken by the dreadful artillery fire which smote it; and as the great French columns came slowly on it fell out of shape, broke, and swept a tumult of fugitives over the crest of the ridge and through the intervals of the British line. "The Dutch-Belgian infantry," says a British officer who watched them, "fell back before the advancing French without much resistance, not in the stubborn, reluctant, deliberate way of our infantry."

On the right of the road the venomous fire of the rifles in the sand-pit made the head of Donzelot's column swing to the right, and the heads of the French columns were thus thrown together, too close for deployment. When within twenty or thirty yards of the crest an attempt to deploy was made with much confusion and tumult. At that moment Picton called upon his men to "stand up,"

and then gave the order to advance. Kempt's brigade, a long thin line, moved forward at the quick-step; the French, a confused mass, was in sight — almost at the touch of their bayonets. When within thirty yards, Picton shouted, "A volley, and then charge." The British line poured on the confused mass a steady shattering volley, and then went forward at the double, broke through the hedge which for a moment shook their formation, fell quickly into line again, and with levelled bayonets ran in upon the French. So close was the volley the British threw as they charged in, that, says Houssaye, "the wads of their guns adhered smoking to the cloth of the French uniforms." As the British line came swiftly on the huge column by its mere bulk for a moment held its ground. Its front files were firing, and Picton, riding on the flank of his line, fell with a bullet through his head.

Donzelot's column, which Kempt's brigade charged, had been retarded by the fire from La Haye Sainte and from the sand-pit; and Marcognet's column—the third echelon—had come up level with it, and, without attempting to deploy, pushed on slightly ahead of it. The leading files reached the hedge, and, according to some accounts, broke through it, but were met by the charging line of Pack's brigade. They were Scotch regiments, and came on with Scottish fire, discharging one steady murderous volley on the mass of Frenchmen

before them, and then closing with the bayonet. But they, too, were disordered by breaking through the hedge, and Picton's last words as he fell were "Rally the Highlanders!"

At that exact moment, when the British line was cruelly scorching the disordered front of the French columns with their fire—or at actual push of bayonet with them—the British cavalry broke in on the struggle. Above the shouts of contending footmen, the crackle of their muskets, there broke the deep sound of the hoofs of galloping horsemen. They seemed to break out of the mist of battle smoke. In a moment the whole front was a line of tossing horse heads, crested helmets, and uplifted swords. The Union Brigade—the Royals, the Inniskillings, the Greys—riding hard, crashed on the nearer French columns. So strangely sudden and unexpected was the charge that, a French officer says, "I was pushing one of our men into his proper place in the ranks when he suddenly sank under a sword-thrust. Turning round I saw the English dragoons riding at our column in every direction, cutting our men down right and left. In vain did our poor fellows try to defend themselves with their bayonets. . . . We were totally defenceless before those terrible dragoons."

At the same moment the Household Brigade—the 1st and 2nd Life Guards, the Blues, and the Dragoon Guards—came over the crest. Wellington

a few minutes earlier had sent down the slope a Hanoverian battalion to strengthen the defenders of La Haye Sainte, and the French cuirassiers had ridden in upon them and destroyed them. It was their one piece of good fortune in the fight. Uxbridge had watched the huge mass of French infantry moving slowly across the valley to attack the British centre; he saw the cuirassiers on their left flank charge and destroy the unhappy Hanoverians; it was the moment for a counter-stroke, and the chance offered was great. He galloped to the Union Brigade on the east side of the Charleroi road, ordered them to wheel in line and charge simultaneously with the Household Brigade; then galloping back, he placed himself on the flank of the first line, and led Somerset's brigade to the charge. The Guards came over the crest just as the cuirassiers—themselves in disorder—were cutting up the Hanoverians. As a detail the British cavalry that morning had no curbs on their bridles, and they had no curb on their spirits. They saw before them a slope of easy turf, some squadrons of French cuirassiers, and four great columns of French infantry. The pace quickened. Uxbridge himself was riding like a trooper on the flank of his brigade. The cuirassiers tried to wheel and form a front, and they met the Guards gallantly enough; but the Blues, the Guards, the Royals, big men and big horses, and riding in on their foes with fierce deter-

mination, were irresistible. Some of the French were flung into the cutting formed by the Ohain road; they struggled along it, and were charged afresh by the pursuing Life Guards as they emerged on the Charleroi road, the British, as an eye-witness says, "hammering on the cuirasses of their opponents like coppersmiths at work." The cuirassiers, still fighting gallantly, but broken and in disorder, were driven, a wrecked mass, on to the infantry column.

In the meanwhile Ponsonby's brigade—the Royals, the Greys, and the Inniskillings—had ridden in on the French. The Royals smote Donzelot's column; the Inniskillings charged the column next in order; the Greys, as it happened, had to ride through the intervals of the 92nd, a Highland regiment, and as the bonneted privates saw the familiar grey horses of their cavalry kinsfolk come at a gallop through their files—the men leaning forward with pointing swords—the Celtic blood in them took fire. "The men," says one of their officers, "simply went mad." Some of them caught the stirrups of the Greys, and raced forward with them.

Here were two brigades—seven regiments—of heavy cavalry, the best horsemen in existence, offered such a chance as might well set what may be called the cavalry imagination on fire. Four great columns of French infantry were within easy sword-stroke. They were not in square, not even in

lines, but jammed together in helpless columns. The ground was with the British regiments; the distance was in their favour—it was just enough to give momentum to their shock. There were no guns to shatter the charging squadrons, no distance to tire their horses, and two armies to watch the charge. They had officers to lead them who might not know how to manœuvre, but if the business was to ride hard, and to ride against all odds, then the officers of these seven regiments had not many equals, and no superiors, under any flag. It was, no doubt, a happy chance that took the Greys through the intervals of the 92nd, but all the squadrons had the inspiration which came from knowing that the entire battle-line watched them ride.

If, in a word, a committee, say, of the youngest cornets in the two brigades had been called upon to arrange affairs so as to give them the rapture of the biggest charge on record, with the least trouble, and all the conditions on their side, they could not have improved on the opportunity which actually came to the brigades of Somerset and Ponsonby.

Good infantry can meet cavalry if in square, and with muskets loaded; but D'Erlon's great columns were practically only a mob, and seven regiments of the best cavalry in the world riding at charging speed, and with all the flame of a charge in their blood, were upon them and amongst them. There

was plenty of courage amongst the unfortunate Frenchmen. Here and there a solitary private, or some gallant officer, broke loose from the mass and stood, single and desperate, against the rush of the charging horse, till trampled out of shape by their hoofs. But individual courage was vain. The men, says Houssaye, "stumbled over one another, and were huddled together in such dire confusion that they had no room to take aim, or even to use their side-arms against the horsemen who penetrated through their bewildered ranks. It was a harrowing sight to see the English break through and slaughter these fine divisions as if they were flocks of sheep. The columns were shattered, scattered, divided, hurled down to the foot of the slope by the swords of the dragoons."

"I never saw such a scene in all my life," says Kincaid. "Hundreds of French infantry threw themselves down and pretended to be dead while the cavalry galloped over them, and then got up and ran away." "The solid mass I had seen twenty minutes before," says another English officer, who watched the scene from the ridge, "was there no more and had now become a defenceless crowd. French officers were brought up from the hollow in great numbers, delivering up their swords. One of our privates brought up two, pushing them before him with his bayonet. They were hatless, and had a flushed and vexed kind of look. They came and

delivered their swords to our colonel, and were then sent to the rear."

Two hours later in the day the French cavalry were to have their chance, and to try their swords on the British infantry. The infantry in Wellington's squares was scantier in number than D'Erlon's columns, and not 3000, but 12,000, cavalry were to ride on them, to ride at will, for two hours, and for part of the time with guns to help them. Yet that whirlwind of furious charges beating on the British ridge did not break a square. How did it happen that less than 3000 British cavalry were able to shatter a mass of French infantry greater than all those squares put together? The explanation is that Wellington's infantry were in square before the charge of the French cavalry began; Napoleon's infantry were put within sword-stroke of charging cavalry in a condition of absolute helplessness. But where was Napoleon's generalship to make this possible?

The British cavalry at this stage had got out of hand, and was "bolting." It was *towards* the enemy—a gallant fault, no doubt, but in discipline, as Hooper says, only second to that of running away *from* the enemy. "It is never intended," he solemnly adds, "that broken squadrons of dragoons should charge an army in position, a fact a British trooper will not, or cannot, understand."

In each of the brigades one regiment was to have

been "in support," but in the fury of the ride each regiment forgot that it was to "support" any other regiment, and galloped and fought for itself. They rode down the slope, across the valley, and up the French slope, charging everything in their front. The Greys galloped over the great battery, leaving it half destroyed, wheeled to the left, and rode eastward, slaying at will. Clusters of galloping troopers from the other regiments, riding fiercely on, reached the second French line, broke in on some artillery waggons, and lived to tell the story, when they returned, of how they saw the drivers, mere boys, sitting and weeping helplessly on their horses. Watching from the British ridge, groups of officers—come to the front from their regiments—could see far away, deep in the masses of the French, tiny patches of white, or of red, moving fiercely to and fro, and spreading confusion everywhere. They were little groups of British horsemen riding amidst their enemies. Their officers were as much to blame for the unrestrained fury of the charge as their men. Lord Uxbridge himself rode like a trooper amongst his fellow-troopers. Colonel Fuller, of the King's Dragoon Guards, was killed in the grand battery in front of La Belle Alliance. Colonel Hamilton, of the Scots Greys, was last seen charging up the French slope, and then disappeared from human vision. His body, stripped, and unrecognised, must have been thrown,

when Waterloo was over, into some unrecorded grave.

Those who came back from the charge had no very clear recollections of what took place in it. Thus, Colonel Thornhill, who was A.D.C. to Lord Uxbridge, and carried the orders to the Blues to advance, says, in the "Waterloo Letters," that he "was most kindly and courteously invited to join them in the charge," an invitation that he, of course, accepted. "All that I remember," he adds, "was we went our best pace in the charge, and Hill told me, a day or two after the fight, 'that the most amusing part of that scene was the uncommon ugly face I made at a bold cuirassier in close quarters with me.'"[1]

Major Kelly, who rode with the 1st Life Guards, tells how he "looked down the British line to his left, and saw the Brigade and the Cuirassiers come to the shock like two walls in the most perfect line he ever saw." It was the 2nd Life Guards which charged the cuirassiers, and Major Weymouth, who rode in the charge, says, "A short struggle enabled us to break through them, notwithstanding the great disadvantage arising from our swords, which were full six inches shorter than theirs. Having once penetrated their line we rode over everything opposed to us."[2] Colonel De Lacey

[1] "Waterloo Letters," p. 17.

[2] Ibid., p. 44.

Evans, who was A.D.C. to Sir William Ponsonby, says:

"The enemy's column, near which I was, on arriving at the crest of the position, seemed very helpless, had very little fire to give from its front or flanks, was incapable of deploying, must have already lost many of its officers on coming up, and was fired into, close, with impunity, by stragglers of our infantry who remained behind. As we approached at a moderate pace, the front and flanks began to turn their backs inwards; the rear of the columns had already begun to run away. . . . The enemy fled as a flock of sheep across the valley—quite at the mercy of the Dragoons. In fact, our men were out of hand."[1]

Colonel Clark Kennedy, who rode in the Dragoon Guards, tells how:

"The head of the column we charged appeared to be seized with a panic, gave us a fire, which brought down about twenty men, went instantly about, and endeavoured to regain the opposite side of the hedge; but we were upon, and amongst, them before this could be effected, the whole column getting so jammed together that the men could not bring down their arms, or use them effectively, and we had nothing to do but to continue to press them down the slope. The French on this occasion," he adds, "behaved very ill, many of our soldiers falling from the fire of men who had surrendered, and whose lives had been spared only a few minutes before. I had a narrow escape myself. One of these men put his musket close to my head and fired, a sudden turn of the head saving my life, the ball taking off the tip of my nose instead of passing through the head as was kindly intended."[2]

Lieutenant Wyndham, of the Scots Greys, says of the charge:

"We wheeled into line and went, in not the most regular order, over and through the hedge in the best way we could,

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[1] "Waterloo Letters," p. 61.

[2] Ibid., pp. 71, 72.

encountering at the same time the French fellows, who had formed themselves at the hedge, and gave us their fire as we came up the hill. We had several killed and wounded at this moment, and our remark ever since that memorable day was the extraordinary manner in which the bullets struck our swords as we ascended."

"The Scots Greys," says Major Winchester, of the 92nd, who watched the fight, "actually walked over this column, and in less than three minutes it was totally destroyed, 2000 of them having been, beside killed and wounded, made prisoners. The green slope was covered with killed and wounded, arms, knapsacks, literally strewn all over." In the charge Captain Clark, of the Royals, captured one French eagle, slaying the officer who bore it. Sergeant Ewart, of the Greys, captured another. He tells the story of his fight with the standard-bearer. "He and I had a hard contest for it. He thrust for my groin, I parried it off, and cut him through the head." A succession of duels followed for the possession of the flag, but Ewart slew each opponent in turn, and carried off the eagle.

Napoleon and his staff had watched the advance of D'Erlon's columns. This was the stroke which was to break through the British centre, and decide the fortunes of the day. The four huge columns moved slowly, for the ground was heavy, but that forest of bayonets, undulating in waves of gleaming points over the rough ground, represented enormous force. The ridge on which they were moving

appeared empty. The left column eddied round La Haye Sainte in a foam of smoke and flame. On the right of the road the Dutch infantry in the path of the second column melted out of shape at its approach and broke into flight. Nothing seemed to oppose the French advance except the tireless flash of the British guns. "All was going marvellously," Napoleon and the group of delighted officers about him declared.

Then the long line of Picton's infantry, a streak of red, came suddenly into vision. A thread of grey smoke ran along it—the smoke of a musketry volley. This was a sight which was new to Napoleon; but many of his staff had seen it again and again in Spain. It was the answer of the line to the column. Still, the line seemed only a thread of colour; the huge columns, steadily creeping on, by mere weight and impact must crash through it.

Then there broke over the crest the vision of galloping horses. They came over the ridge, at first, on the west side of the Charleroi road, riding at speed. The cuirassiers were in the line of their charge, but the galloping squadrons know no check. They smite the cuirassiers, scatter them like spray, drive them into the Wavre road, and over it. La Haye Sainte stands like a rock in the line of those fierce horsemen; they divide on either side, and still gallop on. On the eastern side of the Charleroi

road squadron after squadron comes into sight all charging at speed, squadrons on grey horses at the extremity of the line. These fierce waves of sworded horsemen break on D'Erlon's unhappy columns, disintegrate them, wreck them, shatter them, drive them a broken mass down the slope. Still pressing furiously on, they overwhelm the divisional batteries in their track; they submerge the great battery higher up on the ridge, leaving half its guns disabled. It seems as if they would ride over the whole French army. The rush, the tumult, the struggle, the victory, effervesced like some strong wine in the blood of those furious riders.

But they are few; they have by this time lost order. Two regiments of French lancers, another of cuirassiers, are swooping upon them; the tired riders, with their blown horses, have small chance against such an attack, and they are driven back with cruel loss.

Vandeleur's brigade was brought up from the left to cover Uxbridge's broken cavalry; and two of his regiments—the 12th Light Dragoons and the 16th —went down the slope, charging a fragment of one of the French columns which had escaped attack so far, and then rode at the French lancers, who were slaying the survivors of the heavy brigades, with their blown horses. Vivian, too, had brought up the Hussar Brigade. Some of the 16th, however, caught the infection of the fight, and broke away up the

French ridge, slaying all in their path till they themselves were slain.

It was a broken, sadly reduced cluster of squadrons that came back from the charge, with horses blown, and men exhausted, many of them wounded. Of one squadron of the 1st Dragoon Guards only two men returned. This regiment had the sad distinction of losing more men at Waterloo than any other regiment of cavalry on the field. It mustered barely 500 before the battle began, and it had a total of 275 officers and men killed, wounded, or missing. Of these no less than 124 were "missing." Of the 2nd Life Guards, out of a total loss of 155, 97 were "missing." They perished unrecognised, far in the French position. Colonel Ponsonby, of the 12th Light Dragoons, was captured. Sir William Ponsonby, who commanded the Union Brigade, was slain; he had been made a prisoner, and as there seemed a possibility of his being rescued, his captor had what Houssaye calls "the cruel courage" deliberately to kill his prisoner.

Of the way in which the Greys were cut up by the French lancers, Wyndham gives painful details. "At Brussels, some weeks after," he says, "I found many of our men with ten or twelve lance wounds on them, and one man had seventeen or eighteen wounds on his person—and lived afterwards to tell the story."

That fierce cavalry charge changed the aspect of

the battle for Napoleon. The slope in front of the British ridge was strewn with killed and wounded French. "It had," says Houssaye, "the heart-rending aspect of the day after the battle, and the battle was only commencing." He adds that "not one single Frenchman was left on the slope of Mount St. Jean." But some 3000 Frenchmen were *over* the slope and on their way to Brussels as prisoners, reaching it some hours later, a procession of disgusted men, under the guard of a couple of hundred Dutch infantry.

The number of killed and wounded in D'Erlon's columns by the charge did not come far short of another 3000. But the result of the charge is to be measured by its moral effect, not by the number of French captured or disabled. Of D'Erlon's four divisions, three were, for a time at least, practically put out of the fight. Hougoumont wasted and paralysed the infantry strength of Napoleon's left wing; the charge of the British cavalry shook into ruin nearly three-fourths of the infantry strength of his right wing.

CHAPTER VII

WATERLOO: II.—CAVALRY AND SQUARES

> "So great a soldier taught us there
> What long-enduring hearts could do
> In that world-earthquake, Waterloo."—TENNYSON.

FOR the moment, at least, Napoleon's infantry divisions were demoralised by their failure, and lost their fighting value. A second attack, indeed, was made on La Haye Sainte at half-past three, but it was without energy, and never came within sight of success. But in artillery and in cavalry Napoleon still had great superiority, and behind these he had the reserve of the Old Guard. Each of these arms was now to be tried in turn.

The French batteries opened a new tempest of fire on the British ridge. "Never," says General Alten, "had the oldest soldiers heard such a cannonade." The sound of it was heard at Brussels, at Antwerp; some air-current carried it across the Channel, and on the English coast at Ramsgate men that Sunday afternoon stopped and listened to the faint, sullen waves of sound that seemed to come from the direction of Dunkirk. Wellington drew back his lines to shelter them from that

whirlwind of shot, and the British ridge looked more naked than ever. By this time, too, a stream of wounded, of empty ammunition waggons, of convoys of prisoners and fugitives—all the debris, in a word, of a great battle—was flooding the roads towards Soignes. The British army seemed, to the fierce and sanguine eyes that watched it through the smoke from the French ridge, to be destroyed, or in retreat. But this was, in its results on the French army itself, a suggestion nothing less than deadly.

Ney kindled at the notion that the British were retreating. Now was the time to launch in pursuit the countless squadrons of magnificent cavalry drawn up behind La Belle Alliance. He sent his aide-de-camp riding at speed to order forward a brigade of cuirassiers. But Napoleon's generals were jealous of each other; there was dispute and delay, until Ney himself galloped to Milhaud and fiercely ordered that six regiments should charge. "The salvation of France," he exclaimed, "is at stake!" Two divisions of cuirassiers started at full trot; the chasseurs of the Guard followed, apparently without orders, and caught by the mere contagion of the charge.

Wellington was watching keenly to see what would be Napoleon's next stroke, and saw to his surprise that—at this early stage of the fight—it was taking the shape of a great cavalry attack. It

was quickly clear, too, that the attack was being directed on the right centre of the British line, at the gap betwixt Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte. This was held by Halkett's division, a force of 6000 men, and its regiments were swiftly thrown into form for the tempest about to break on them. An infantry square has four equal, but not extensive, faces; and, to secure a wider front of fire, Wellington arranged his battalions so that, when it was necessary to meet cavalry, they fell into oblongs rather than squares, the front and rear of each oblong consisting of four companies, the sides of one company each.

Five of these oblongs formed the first line, four were placed checker-wise as a second line, and so as to cover the openings in the first line. By this plan the French cavalry had to advance on a wide front of fire; when they poured through the intervals in the first line they would be met by the volleys of the oblongs in the second line. Then, as they struggled, broken and shaken, through the volleying zigzag of these oblongs, the British cavalry, drawn up in the rear, was waiting to charge them. It was an arrangement of deadly skill and power.

Forty squadrons of splendid cavalry—a mass of 5000 horsemen, helmeted, mail-clad, gay with splendid uniforms, terrible with lance and sword—were now advancing at a slow gallop across the valley on the west side of the Charleroi road midway betwixt the two "bastions"—La Haye Sainte and

Hougoumont—thrust out in front of the British line. The British guns smote their front with a cruel fire, the skirmishers at Hougoumont stung their flank with musketry volleys. The soft soil made the horses flounder, the long rye was up to the knees of the riders; but stubbornly, gallantly, that huge column of men and horses came on; their shouts, and the ring of scabbard on stirrup floated up to the British ridge. The leading squadrons were cuirassiers, and they rode with bent heads, so that each helmet looked like a metal cone; and this, added to the steel breast-plates, gave the effect of a line of gigantic horsemen literally clad in steel. No wonder they looked terrible.

When they were within fifty yards of the crest the British guns discharged one final blast of shot into the coming squadrons; scores of men and horses fell, and for a moment the whole mass seemed to quiver and hesitate. Then it came on again; the British gunners abandoned their pieces and, running, flung themselves under the bayonets of the nearest squares. The French horse were on the ridge, they swept over it, they eddied in triumph round the silent and abandoned English guns. Nothing opposed them but a cluster of silent squares—or rather oblongs—of infantry, five in the first rank, four in the second line, and covering the intervals of the first.

The Frenchmen had drawn rein, and for a moment

there was, on both sides, a curious and astonishing silence. Then the cuirassiers charged. They resembled a river of steel, in which the nine squares stood like half-submerged rocks. But each square, with its four steady, bayoneted fronts, and now spitting fire on every front, was a formidable obstacle. The French cavalry swept through the intervals, and rode with a clamour of shouts and uplifted swords, almost on to the very bayonets of the squares. But they never rode quite home. The narrow ridge gave them no room to gather momentum in the charge. They eddied—or drifted—through the second line of squares and were instantly charged by the British cavalry and driven fiercely back through the intervals betwixt the squares, and torn by fresh musketry volleys in the process. Then as they ebbed back over the crest the British gunners ran out, re-manned their guns, and opened a deadly pursuing fire on them. The French squadrons had swept over the British ridge, had captured a dozen batteries, and had ridden round every face of the squares. But these red human islets somehow remained undestroyed, and at the end of the whole wild process the astonished French squadrons found themselves, a disordered crowd, at the foot of the slope up which, some twenty minutes before, they had ridden with such eagerness, believing that there was nothing but a flying enemy before them.

But the French are gallant soldiers. Their officers rode to and fro, with uplifted swords, calling upon the scattered files to fall into order; then they led them back up the slope. The French came on again, squadron after squadron of fierce riders, following each other like sea-waves. They suffered cruel loss riding in the teeth of the British guns, but once more they crossed the ridge, captured the guns, rode through the intervals betwixt the checker-work of the British squares, and across the whole chess-board of the ridge; were smitten once more by the British cavalry, and went back down the slope with the British guns, remanned, blazing on them.

Napoleon, with Soult by his side, had watched the French cavalry riding in their charge. Its appearance was a surprise; at first Napoleon thought it must be English cavalry, though it was going in the wrong direction. The real nature of the attack, however, was quickly understood, and great was the joy in Napoleon's staff when one gallant squadron after another disappeared, without a check, over the British ridge. What infantry could resist such a charge? The enemy's line was broken. There was a long-sustained tumult of voices beyond the crest, and through the tumult rolled wave after wave of ordered sound — the crash of steady musketry volleys—not the spluttering fire of infantry in flight. Presently, back over the ridge came the

French cavalry, in disordered reflux—scores of squadrons tumbled together, and many riderless horses amongst them. They re-formed in the valley, rode up the hill again, and over it, and once more along the whole ridge west of the Charleroi road rolled the steady thunder of musketry volleys. Then, broken, disordered, in scantier numbers, with many a riderless horse on its flanks, came back again the wreck of the magnificent French cavalry.

"This is a premature movement which may produce fatal results," said Napoleon to Soult. "Ney is compromising us as he did at Jena," growled Soult, in reply. "This has taken place," said Napoleon, "an hour too soon. But we must stand by what is already done"; and he sent an order to Kellerman to reinforce the cavalry attack with four brigades of his heavy horse. Kellerman was a cool and able soldier, and knew that Ney was wasting the strength of the cavalry in these attacks on unbroken infantry; but, while he debated, his first division, to use Houssaye's words, "set off at full trot without waiting for any orders." Kellerman was obliged to follow with his second division. The heavy cavalry of the Guards—dragoons and mounted grenadiers—added themselves to the charge. Here were sixty squadrons of fresh cavalry joining the forty squadrons which Ney had with such ill-success already led twice over the British ridge. Some 9000 cavalry, in a word, were forcing themselves through

a gap on Wellington's front barely sufficient for the deployment of half their number. The interval betwixt Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte is less than a thousand yards, and this space was, of course, narrowed by what may be called the fire-zone of those two "redoubts"; so that this vast mass of French horse was poured through an interval of probably not more than 700 yards.

As they pressed through this comparatively narrow gap their ranks were so closely jammed that, says Houssaye, "the horses were actually lifted off the ground by the pressure." The whole space was an undulating sea of crested helmets, sword-blades, pennoned lances, tossing horse-heads with red, expanded nostrils and flowing manes. To the English, says Houssaye, "they looked like a rising tide of steel." They certainly formed a magnificent target for the British guns.

Nothing stopped these gallant and splendid horsemen. A low rolling sound ran before them like the breaking of waves on some wind-blown coast. Then over the edge there came the long line of up-flung horse-heads, with red nostrils, and above them the slanting, brass helmets, a tag of horse-hair streaming back from each crest. Beneath the helmets were fierce brown faces and gleaming breast-plates. With bent heads and swords pointed forward, they came through the flame of the guns over the edge of the crest in successive waves,

and rode, not *on* to the British squares—there is no instance in the whole struggle of a charge frankly driven home upon any square—but through the intervals betwixt the squares—narrow zigzag channels edged with deadly musketry volleys. When they had struggled through the second line they were charged, in the familiar fashion, by the waiting, if scanty, British cavalry beyond, and came back through the intervals betwixt the squares again, paying dreadful toll in the passage, and so down the ridge.

Again and again these scenes were repeated. Some of the British squares endured thirteen assaults. But the French charges grew slower and less effective; the horses floundering in the soft, deep soil could not be spurred to a gallop; the whole ridge was encumbered with non-combatants, wounded men crawling from under heaps of the slain, dismounted cuirassiers walking heavily, borne down by the weight of their armour, towards the valley. Those stubborn human oblongs shrunk in area as charge after charge was flung upon them, but not one was broken. The charging horsemen were demoralised; squadrons and troops lost all order, but not the obstinate, steady, infantry regiments. The British squares, indeed, grew yet more confident in themselves—they even grew a little contemptuous towards the foes attacking them—as the combat raged. At first the young soldiers

fired hurriedly, and high, as they saw a mass of cavalry, so formidable in appearance, about to break upon them. And some of the French horse wore, no doubt, a very formidable aspect. Houssaye describes the mounted cuirassiers as "giants on huge steeds whose stature was augmented by their huge hairy helmets. They looked like a moving wall." But the British soon learned the power of their muskets, and of the disciplined square in which they stood. Nothing could shatter it; nothing could approach it. "Here comes these fools again," the men would say, jesting with each other as they prepared to meet a new charge.

The French horse, to the very last, came on bravely; but in the end, having shouted themselves hoarse, and ridden their horses almost to a standstill, they were helpless. Their charge cooled down to an exhausted and stumbling walk. Mail-clad cuirassiers, lancers with their pennons, dragoons with naked swords, rode slowly to and fro on the ridge, to use Wellington's phrase, "as though they owned it." The English squares and the French squadrons, says Lord Uxbridge, "seemed for a time hardly taking any notice of each other." Ney himself seems to have been the only man who did not become cool as the charges became slower. He was seen with a broken sword striking with fury at an English gun.

The French cavalry, in a word, had exhausted

its attacking power; the squares were inexpugnable. Yet the proud Frenchmen, though they could not conquer, scarcely knew how to yield. Napoleon at St. Helena said that if Murat had led his cavalry at Waterloo he would have broken the British squares. Some one asked Wellington if he thought Murat would have done this. "No," he said. "Nor ten Murats."

Says Jackson in his "Notes of a Staff Officer"[1]—

"I many times saw the gallant cuirassiers come on with boldness to within some twenty or thirty yards of a square, when, seeing the steady firmness of our men, they invariably edged away and retired. Sometimes they would halt and gaze at the triple row of bayonets, when two or three brave officers would advance and strive by voice and gesture to urge the attack, raising their helmets aloft on their sabres, the better to be seen by their irresolute men; but all in vain, as no efforts could make them close with the terrible bayonets, and meet certain destruction. Had their efforts been directed against squares of the second line, they would have had some chance of success, as I repeatedly noticed unsteadiness among our foreigners—men running from them to the rear, when two or three staff officers would intercept them and drive them back. I more than once assisted in this, and was surprised at the ease with which the fellows were driven back to their duty."

Why did the attack of French cavalry on British infantry fail so completely, when the attack of British cavalry on French infantry succeeded so magnificently? The two brigades that wrecked D'Erlon's columns counted little over 2500 swords, and they overthrew an infantry force of at least 16,000. If less than 3000 British horsemen at two

[1] P. 48.

o'clock could overthrow 16,000 French infantry, why did 12,000 French cavalry, individually as brave as the Guards or the Greys, fail to crush 9000 British infantry, though they spent from four o'clock to six o'clock in the effort? No doubt the British soldier, if less swift in attack, is cooler and more stubborn in defence than the French soldier. But the true explanation is found, in this case, in the General rather than in the man in the ranks. D'Erlon's columns were unprepared for cavalry, while Wellington had thrown his regiments into a disposition which made the attack of cavalry almost hopeless.

It must be remembered that these nine oblongs consisted of the infantry of the 3rd Division, numbering a little over 6000; and of these Halkett's brigade alone was British, made up of the 30th, 33rd, 69th, and 73rd—in all about 2500 muskets. It formed the western group of the oblongs; the King's German Legion the eastern group; Kielmansegge's Hanoverian brigade filled the centre; and the first cavalry charges were flung on these three brigades alone. In steadiness and fighting quality the King's German Legion was equal to Halkett's regiments; the Hanoverians were of more doubtful quality, and this was why their oblongs were placed in the centre. But they kept their place, and the fame of wrecking Napoleon's famous cavalry is to be shared by the German and Hanoverian squares with those of Halkett's. Later, of

course, the area of the cavalry charges widened, and other regiments were swept by that whirlwind of galloping horses and mail-clad horsemen. At one stage of the long and desperate wrestle betwixt horsemen and footmen Wellington drew Adam's brigade from his right, and placed it at an angle betwixt the ridge and Hougoumont. Some of Maitland's regiments—notably the Guards—had to stand long in squares to keep their ground against the tempest of French cavalry.

How cruelly the long strain told on the British squares is shown by one incident. Wellington had ridden up to the 23rd, and, peering through the smoke, saw what seemed to be a body of men a few score yards in advance. "What square is that?" he asked. It was a square of the dead. The 23rd had held that position until the ranks of the living were congested and embarrassed by the numbers of the slain. The colonel had drawn the survivors a little distance back to get clear standing-room, but the outline of a square, made up of the slain, still marked the original position of the regiment.

So dreadful was the slaughter in the 73rd that, for a moment, a gap in one of its fronts, through which a blast of grape had torn, was left unfilled. The colonel said with a smile, "Well, lads, if you won't, I must," and pushed his horse lengthwise across the space. But the nearest privates seized the bridle of his horse, pushed

it aside, and the men filled up the gap with their own bodies.

Gronow of the 1st Foot Guards says:

"During the battle our square presented a shocking sight. Inside we were nearly suffocated by the smoke and smell of burnt cartridges, and it was impossible to move a yard without treading upon a wounded comrade or the bodies of the dead. . . . I shall never forget the strange noise our bullets made against the breast-plates of the cuirassiers, of whom there were six or seven thousand. It resembled the noise of a violent hail-storm beating against panes of glass. . . . Nothing could be more gallant," he adds, "than the behaviour of the French. . . . In the midst of our terrible fire their officers were seen as if on parade keeping order in their ranks to encourage them."

In these cavalry charges there was, on the French side, it must be repeated, measureless daring. No more fiery leader than Ney can be imagined, and no captain could have desired more gallant followers. But there was a strange lack of method in the attack. It was made at the wrong time, and under wrong conditions. Whole divisions of cavalry, as we have seen, added themselves to the fight without instructions, merely swept away by the contagion of the moment. Napoleon himself said of Ney that "when in battle he forgot all the troops that were not immediately about him." He certainly forgot adequately to support the cavalry attack with infantry and with guns. But if Ney forgot, why did not Napoleon himself remember? Some batteries might easily have been taken up to the British ridge, and the squares offered a helpless human

target. Later, as a matter of fact, some guns were advanced till they bore on the squares, and they wrought cruel mischief. The squares were tempting targets—soft, huge, and incapable of being missed—for the French gunners, and they tore red seams through them; the square contracting as it closed up till round the knees of the outer line as they knelt was a sort of broad selvedge of the dead and the wounded. If the Old Guard had advanced at this moment, instead of two hours later, it is difficult to see how Wellington could have escaped defeat. But the French squadrons were allowed to exhaust themselves. A cavalry regiment soon reaches the point when the tired horses can gallop no further, and the tired riders have no more fighting power; and by six o'clock Napoleon's magnificent cavalry was practically destroyed as a fighting force.

Late in the charges, indeed, Ney sent a message to Napoleon asking for infantry to support these cavalry rushes, but Napoleon was feeling the strain of the Prussian attack on his flank at the moment, and he replied angrily, "Infantry! Where does he suppose I can get them? Does he expect me to make them?"

Just before six o'clock indeed, and when this whirlwind of cavalry charges had almost exhausted itself, an advance was made by six regiments of infantry belonging to Foy's division towards the British ridge, but it was too late. The British guns were

once more in action, and as Wellington had now brought up part of Hill's division so as to fill the gap betwixt Hougoumont and the ridge, the unfortunate French found themselves in a sort of crescent of converging gun fire, which swept through them. Foy describes it as "a hail of death." In a few minutes 1500 men were killed and wounded.

On the other hand, Wellington, as he watched the close of this stage of the great fight, and saw the French cavalry visibly losing their *élan* and attacking power, cried to Adam who stood beside him, "By G——, Adam, I think we shall beat them yet." That "yet" is expressive; it gives a glimpse of the strain on Wellington, and of the mood, resolute, but not lightly sanguine, in which he was fighting Waterloo.

It is always interesting to see what aspect a great fight wears, as seen through the eyes of the man in the ranks; and Morris, who was a sergeant in the 73rd, gives, in his "Recollections of Military Service,"[1] a curious account of the experiences of his regiment during the cavalry charges. Just before the charges began he stood beside a comrade, Sergeant Burton. "I told him I thought very few of us would live to see the close of that day," when he said, "Tom, I'll tell you what it is: there is no shot made yet for either you or me." The mind of

[1] P. 219.

the British private, it is clear, has a sort of dogged fatalism running through it!

"As the enemy's artillery was taking off a great many of our men," says Morris, "we were ordered to lie down, to avoid the shots as much as possible; and I took advantage of this circumstance to obtain an hour's sleep, as comfortably as ever I did in my life, though there were at that time upwards of three hundred cannon in full play. But our services were now soon to be required. A considerable number of the French cuirassiers made their appearance, on the rising ground just in our front, took the artillery we had placed there, and came at a gallop down upon us. Their appearance was certainly enough to inspire a feeling of dread—none of them under six feet; defended by steel helmets and breast-plates, made pigeon-breasted to throw off the balls. Their appearance was of such a formidable nature that I thought we could not have the slightest chance with them. They came up rapidly, until within about ten or twelve paces of the square, when our rear ranks poured into them a well-directed fire, which put them into confusion, and they retired; the two front ranks, kneeling, then discharged their pieces at them. Many of the cuirassiers fell wounded, and several were killed; those of them that were dismounted by the death of their horses, immediately unclasped their armour to facilitate their escape. . . . The same body of the enemy, though baffled twice, seemed determined to force a passage through us; and on their next advance they brought some artillerymen, turned the cannon in our front upon us, and fired into us with grape-shot, which proved very destructive, making complete lanes through us; and then the horsemen came up to dash in at the openings. But before they reached us we had closed our files, throwing the dead outside, and taking the wounded inside the square; and they were again forced to retire. They did not, however, go further than the pieces of cannon—waiting there to try the effect of some more grape-shot. We saw the match applied, and again it came thick as hail upon us. . . . Our situation, now, was truly awful; our men were falling by dozens every fire. About this time, also, a large shell fell just in front of us, and while the fuze was

burning out, we were wondering how many of us it would destroy. When it burst about seventeen men were either killed or wounded by it; the portion which came to my share was a piece of rough cast-iron, about the size of a horse-bean, which took up its lodging in my left cheek; the blood ran copiously down inside my clothes, and made me rather uncomfortable. . . .

"The next charge the cavalry made, they deliberately walked their horses up to the bayonet's point; and one of them, leaning over his horse, made a thrust at me with his sword. I could not avoid it, and involuntarily closed my eyes. When I opened them again, my enemy was *lying* just in front of me, within reach, in the act of thrusting at me. He had been wounded by one of my rear rank men, and whether it was the anguish of the wound, or the chagrin of being defeated, I know not; but he endeavoured to terminate his existence with his own sword; but that being too long for the purpose, he took one of our bayonets, which was lying on the ground, and raising himself up with one hand, he placed the point of the bayonet under his cuirass, and fell on it. . . . The fire from the French infantry was so tremendous that our brigade divided and sought shelter behind some banks. . . . The only captain we now had left invited us from the shelter of the bank, to follow him in an attack on about 3000 of the French infantry. About a dozen of us accepted the invitation; and such was the destructive fire to which we were opposed, that we had not advanced more than six or seven paces before every one of the party, except me and my brother, was either killed or wounded. . . . After the fight we were mustered. We numbered two officers and seventy men; the battalion, when we entered the field the first day, had twenty-nine officers and 550 men. My worthy friend, Burton, gave me a hearty slap on the back, and said, 'Out with the grog, Tom; did I not tell you there was no shot made for you or me!'" Fatalism, apparently, had justified itself!

When the cavalry charges were visibly dying out Napoleon sent a message to Ney that he must

capture La Haye Sainte at all costs. All three arms —infantry, artillery, and cavalry—had been tried on the stubborn British, and in vain. Hougoumont had resisted an army corps and was still resisting. But the British cavalry—like the French—was exhausted, and perhaps La Haye Sainte, with no Life Guards and Greys to ride out in its defence, might be carried; and so came the order to Ney.

Ney immediately led against the farmhouse two columns from Donzelot's division, and after a desperate contest it was captured. Baring's Germans had held the place with magnificent courage all through the day, and when the French stormed in Baring himself and forty-two men—all that remained of nine companies—fought their way through the French and escaped to the ridge. There is an amazing conflict of testimony, both as to the time La Haye Sainte was captured, and the reason of its capture. Wellington himself says it "was captured at two o'clock through the negligence of the officer who commanded that post." That statement is both a blunder and an injustice. No men could have fought better than the Germans in La Haye Sainte. Most of the French writers say it was carried at four o'clock; Baring himself, a sufficiently good authority, says he held it till six o'clock, and many witnesses support him. Its capture was due to the fact that Baring's men had exhausted their ammunition, and no supplies reached them. Wel-

lington himself says the failure of ammunition was "due to the fact that there was no door in the wall nearest the ridge," and so no supplies could be sent in; and most historians since have repeated that tale. But there *was* a door, as Shaw Kennedy shows in the plan he draws of the buildings, and the true reason why the ammunition failed is told by Sir Richard Hennegan, who, as head of the Field Train Department in the Waterloo campaign, is an authoritative witness. He says the failure of ammunition in La Haye Sainte was due to the exhaustion in the field depots of the particular cartridge used for German rifles. Sir Richard Hennegan himself had charge of this work, and he says: "Towards the close of the day the last round of this particular species of ammunition had been issued, and no more could be sent to them."[1]

[1] "Seven Years' Campaigning," vol. ii. p. 321.

CHAPTER VIII

WATERLOO: III.—THE DARK HOUR

"One that sought but Duty's iron crown
On that loud Sabbath shook the spoiler down;
A day of onsets of despair!
Dash'd on every rocky square
Their surging charges foam'd themselves away;
Last, the Prussian trumpet blew,
Thro' the long-tormented air."—TENNYSON.

THE capture of La Haye Sainte was the first real success the French had won, and it made a deep wound in Wellington's battle front. A French battery was pushed up to its flank; the sand-pit which had been held by the 93rd during all the early hours of the fight was now crowded with French musketry. The battery fired at a distance of less than 300 yards upon the British line, the skirmishers crept up to within eighty yards, and fragments of three of D'Erlon's broken divisions were pushed forward as far as the Wavre road. Shaw Kennedy tells how he rode to Wellington and told him of the gap in his centre, and of the coolness and quickness with which he at once provided for the peril. But the peril was great. How bitter and venomous was the French infantry attack may be

judged from the experiences of the 27th. It reached Waterloo at nine o'clock on the morning of the battle, having marched from Ghent all through the night of the 17th. The men fell into an exhausted slumber as soon as they were placed in position on the second line, and all the guns of Waterloo failed to awaken them. About six o'clock they were brought up into line above La Haye Sainte, and in a space of time to be measured in minutes almost every second man in the regiment was shot down.

This was the dark stage of the battle, and the state of the atmosphere reflected the mood of the struggle. The black, strangling smoke—the smoke of many guns, of incessant musketry volleys, and of fire-blackened Hougoumont—drifted slowly across the whole field of battle. It was difficult for the combatants to see each other.

The Prussians, it must be remembered, were expected to make their appearance on the field at two o'clock. But Bulow's division only broke out of Planchenoit at half-past four, threatening what may be called the rear right of Napoleon's position. The attack lessened the pressure on Wellington's front by diverting Napoleon's infantry reserves in that direction, but it was too remote from the ridge on which the British stood to add to their strength. Ziethen reached Ohain at six o'clock, but he approached the scene of action in very cautious—not to say reluctant—fashion. Jackson, an officer on the Ad-

jutant-General's staff, was perhaps the first British officer who came into touch with them, and he tells how the slow approach of their skirmishers seemed to him intolerable. The aspect the fight wore, indeed, gave to the Prussians the sense that what they saw was a defeat. The British ridge seemed almost empty; the roads and forests in the rear were thick with stragglers. Jackson says that, earlier in the day, he found in the outskirts of the forest what seemed to be entire companies, with regularly piled arms, and fires blazing under cooking kettles, while the men lay about smoking as if no enemy were within a day's march. They were human driftwood from the fight, all of them Belgian or Dutch. Muffling estimates the runaways hidden in the forest at 10,000. There was a tide of fugitives flowing towards Brussels—Belgians in whole companies, wounded soldiers, camp followers. No wonder Ziethen hesitated to step on such a stage. It was only Muffling's assurance, indeed, that the British were still unshaken on the ridge which induced Ziethen to push forward.

One who watched the sight on the Brussels road describes how through this ignoble rout he saw a detachment of Scots Greys and Inniskilling Dragoons come riding. They were twenty-five in number, every man was wounded; some had lost their helmets, and had handkerchiefs bound round their heads, from which the blood ran thick over their

faces. But all rode with a proud and fierce air. They were convoying two captured French eagles; one was carried high in air, the other had been broken from its pole in the struggle to capture it. Another little group, a detachment of British artillery, with ammunition, was pushing its way, silent, grim, and resolute, through the stream of fugitives towards the battle, a picture of disciplined valour.

It was a dark hour for the British. La Haye Sainte had fallen, Papelotte was held by the French, and two of the three "bastions" which guarded Wellington's front were thus lost. The British brigades had shrunk almost to regiments, the regiments to companies. "Where is your brigade?" Vivian asked Somerset, who commanded the Household Cavalry. "Here," said Somerset, pointing to two scanty squadrons, with many riderless or wounded horses. Some of the squares had moved back, seeking cover from the incessant fire of the French guns, but the positions they had first occupied were still perfectly defined on the trodden soil by the dead that lay in ranks. Seen sometimes through the whirling smoke, the square of the dead, indeed, looked more solid than the square of the living. Just about this time a couple of sergeants of the 73rd came up to Major Kelly, who was on the staff of his division, and told him they had no one to command them,

their officers all being killed or wounded. He told the sergeants he would come and take charge of the regiment himself, and as he came up the scanty survivors of the 73rd cheered him. That sound of cheering voices was caught up by the regiments on every side; it ran far, and served to stiffen the sorely-shaken line. In more than one of the squares sergeants were in command of companies, and played their part gallantly.

At one moment the whole space between Halkett's brigade and Kempt's was empty, Ompteda's brigade being practically destroyed, and that gaping wound in Wellington's line was a deadly peril. Shaw Kennedy galloped direct to Wellington with the news. Wellington listened with unmoved countenance, and found an instant remedy for the peril. He bade Kennedy get "all the troops of the German division on the spot and all the guns you can find," while he in person brought up some Brunswick troops.

The spot above La Haye Sainte became a sort of duelling post betwixt the two armies. A procession of unrelated, wrathful, and desperate attacks on the British line occurred at this point, attacks which represented rather the fury of individual combatants than the impulse of any directing mind. A couple of squadrons of cuirassiers, with half a battalion of infantry, apparently under some self-selected leader, would suddenly emerge through the

smoke, dash in on the slender British line, and persist in the attack till most of them were shot down; then the survivors would sullenly stalk through the smoke back again. More than once a single French cavalry officer suddenly broke out of the smoke, and rode alone at the English line, like a Malay running amok, and perished there. The French infantry attack was in a sense planless; but it was bitter, and grew ever deadlier.

"For two or three hours," says Kincaid, "there was no variety with us, but one continued blaze of musketry. The smoke hung so thick about that, though not more than eighty yards apart, we could only distinguish each other by the flashes of the pieces. Our division, which had stood upwards of 5000 men at the beginning of the battle, had dwindled down into a solitary line of skirmishers. The 27th were literally lying dead in square a few yards behind us. I had never yet heard of a battle in which everybody was killed; but this seemed likely to be an exception, as we were all going by turns."

Wellington was at La Haye Sainte at this critical moment, and Jackson, in his "Notes of a Staff Officer," gives a picturesque sketch of his appearance and bearing.

"All the staff, except a single aide-de-camp, had received a signal to keep back, in order not to attract the enemy's fire; we remained, therefore, under the brow of the elevated ground, and, the better to keep out of observation, dismounted. As I looked over my saddle, I could just trace the outlines of the Duke and his horse amidst the smoke, standing very near the Highlanders of Picton's division, bearing a resemblance to the statue in Hyde Park when partially shrouded by fog, while the balls

—and they came thickly—hissed harmlessly over our heads. It was a time of intense anxiety, for had the Duke fallen, Heaven only knows what might have been the result of the fight! . . . At times the situation of the staff, like that of the troops, when standing to be pounded by round and grape shot, was trying enough, while at others it was very exciting; but nothing that occurred seemed to produce any effect on the Duke, whom I had frequent opportunities of observing, as he would often turn and countermarch, thereby closely passing all who followed. His countenance and demeanour were at all times quite calm, rarely speaking to any one, save to give an order, or send a message; indeed, he generally rode quite alone; that is, no one was at his side, seeming unconscious even of the presence of his own troops, whilst his eye kept scanning intently those of his great opponent. Occasionally he would stoop and peer for a few seconds through the large field telescope which he carried in his right hand; and this his horse, the docile Copenhagen, his old Peninsular favourite, permitted without a sign of impatience. Thus he would promenade in front of the troops, along the crest of their position, watching the enemy's preparations for their attacks."

At half-past four, while Ney's cavalry was riding furiously amongst Wellington's squares, Blucher broke out from Chapelle St. Lambert, and first made himself seriously felt on Napoleon's flank and rear. Wellington, of course, expected the appearance of the Prussians at a much earlier hour; he believed, indeed, that they were almost within touch before the first shot was fired. Long afterwards he declared, "I saw the Prussians within four miles of us, filing over a stream at ten o'clock in the morning. . . . They did not reach us till seven in the evening." But he was plainly mis-

[1] Pp. 42–44.

taken; he did not see the Prussians so soon, nor did they arrive so late, as he imagined.

Blucher had great difficulties; nothing, indeed, in the whole landscape of Waterloo is finer than the courage with which he drove his columns over the miry cross-roads betwixt Wavre and Waterloo. Not Wellington's dogged infantry keeping their squares unbroken when torn with shot, and almost submerged in a sea of cuirassiers, are a finer example of soldiership than Blucher's long columns toiling through the deep muddy lanes on the French flank; "the sturdy legions of north Germans," to use Chesney's words, "with clenched teeth and straining limbs forcing their guns through mire and over obstructions that their fierce old chieftain might keep his pledge to Wellington."

At half-past four o'clock only 16,000 Prussians were within sight of the French, who were holding Planchenoit in their front, but Blucher pushed out into the open and began his fight. In the village the position held by the French was of curious strength. A stone wall, curving like a horseshoe, shuts round the village church, and both lanes which run through the village open within the "horseshoe." The French held the church and the wall in great force; the Prussians pushed in solid column up both the lanes with stubborn courage, but with scanty soldiership, for the heads of the columns were being thrust into a semicircle

of fire. The chief loss sustained at Waterloo by the Prussians is explained by the slaughter within the "horseshoe" of Planchenoit. As the later Prussian divisions came up they were pushed past the right of the village, and the French had to fall back from it. Napoleon sent reinforcements to the scene, for the Prussian advance threatened to break his communications. Planchenoit was taken and retaken, stubborn German valour wrestling with fiery Gallic daring. A charge by two battalions of the Old Guard at last swept the Prussians from the village, and Blucher's advance seemed to be arrested. But Napoleon, wisely sensitive to a stroke on his rear, formed some battalions of the Guards into squares, and posted them betwixt Planchenoit and La Belle Alliance.

The fight round Planchenoit drew, in all, 12,000 good troops—Ropes says 16,000—from Napoleon's reserves, and all sorts of arm-chair critics since have speculated as to what would have happened to Wellington if Blucher had not appeared on the scene, and the battalions of Young Guard and Old Guard, wrestling with the Prussians at Planchenoit had, say, marched up the Charleroi road past La Haye Sainte, and broken like a thunderbolt on the centre of the British position. But such speculations are idle breath. If Wellington had not been sure that Blucher would join him at Waterloo that battle would never have been fought.

The appearance of the Prussians on the battlefield was the very bargain which justified Wellington making his stand at Mont St. Jean; he undertook to run the great hazards of battle alone, till Blucher joined him, because he knew Blucher *would* join him. The certainty that the Prussians would come along the Wavre road was a factor in the tactics of Waterloo as surely counted upon by Wellington as the dash of his cavalry brigades, or the unshakable courage of his infantry squares.

It is true he expected Blucher to appear earlier in the battle, and to have come by a nearer route; for Planchenoit, where the Prussian columns first broke into the fight, is a mile and a half distant from the intersection of the Charleroi and Wavre roads, the centre of Wellington's position. The British army had to pay a dreadful price for those long hours of waiting for Blucher. But, looked at in the perspective of history, the late hour the Prussians reached the battlefield, though it cost the British much, served the cause for which they fought magnificently. It made the strain of battle longer for Wellington's army; but it shortened the campaign. It made the defeat of Napoleon overwhelming. Had Blucher's columns appeared on the Wavre road at two o'clock it is certain Napoleon would have retreated; he could have reached France undestroyed, and he might have fought in 1815 another campaign in front of Paris as skil-

ful and bloody as that of 1814. But Blucher did not begin his attack on Planchenoit till Napoleon had flung almost his last battalion into the fight; his infantry was hopelessly broken, his cavalry wrecked, the Old Guard itself was committed to an assault which was to end in defeat.

The Prussians, in a word, broke through, and out of, Planchenoit at the exact moment when the French army was bankrupt. The fighting power of the French army throughout its whole extent was exhausted. What overtook it was not a defeat, but destruction. The longer the battle of Waterloo lasted before the appearance of the Prussians, the shorter was the campaign which followed the battle. Practically, indeed, the whole campaign was summed up, and ended, when the 52nd broke the last square of the Old Guard on the slope opposite Hougoumont.

Ziethen was at Ohain betwixt six and seven o'clock, and Colonel Fremantle, a member of Wellington's staff, begged him to send a detachment, if only of 3000 men, to strengthen the British left. Ziethen objected; the main body of his forces was not yet up. A staff officer whom he had sent forward to see how matters stood reported the British to be in full retreat, and Ziethen swung the head of his column to the left to join Bulow at Planchenoit. Muffling at this moment galloped up, assured him that the British were standing firm, and Ziethen—

still with much hesitation—pushed on to Smohain. His appearance there enabled Wellington to draw from his left to his centre, where they were solely needed, the cavalry brigades of Vivian and Hussey.

It was now seven o'clock. For nearly nine hours a tempest of attack such as few battlefields have ever seen had beaten on the stubborn British lines. Wellington's army still survived, but its aspect had changed. Its front was ragged; the wings had drawn in towards the centre, and the shortened line was, in parts at least, of perilous tenuity. Brigades had shrunk to regiments, regiments to companies. The fierce sustained fire of battle had burned out the weaker fibres in Wellington's army. In one case at least—that of the Cumberland Hussars—a whole regiment had ridden off the field; and the story is still to be read how Captain Horace Seymour—who bore the reputation of being the strongest man in the British army—when verbal remonstrance failed, took the commander of that regiment by the neck and shook him as a dog might shake a rat, in order to persuade him to offer the French not the backs of his men but their faces; and shook him in vain.

The British army, before the battle began, was made up of alternating patches of red and blue, but by nightfall its colour scheme was altered. The red patches had shrunk in area, the blue patches

had almost disappeared. It must not be supposed, however, that it was only Dutch-Belgians or Hanoverians who found the strain of battle too severe, and crept, or drifted, into flight. "It is not every man who has a red coat," said Wellington, "who is a hero"; and there were red coats as well as blue coats among the stragglers in the Soignes forest. But the scanty battalions who still held the ridge at Waterloo, with their wounded and dead lying thick about them, were soldiers of the finest temper. Some one asked Wellington about this stage of the battle what were his orders. "There are no orders," he said, "except to stand firm to the last man." Into that sentence is condensed not only the purpose of their general, but the spirit of the sorely battered British regiments standing just then on the ridge at Waterloo.

CHAPTER IX

WATERLOO: IV.—THE OLD GUARD

"What are you about to do?"—ADAM *to* COLBORNE.
"To make that column (the Old Guard) feel our fire."—COLBORNE.

A LITTLE after seven o'clock Napoleon prepared to fling his last card on the iron table of the battlefield; he would send forward his "bearskins." The attack of the Old Guard, the very *élite* of the French army, was in Napoleon's tactics, the final bid for victory. There is still distracted and unsettled debate both as to the exact time the Old Guard was flung into the fight, the number of battalions engaged, and the formation in which they advanced; and these questions will probably never be settled. Houssaye, with perhaps the unconscious bias of a Frenchman, anxious to attenuate a blow to French fame, reduces the number of battalions to five, a force of, perhaps, 3000 or 3500 muskets. Hooper reckons them at ten; Ropes says there were "eight or probably six"; Pratt reckons them at six. They were placed under the command of Ney, and the tiny force was rich at

least in generals. Friant was the immediate commander of the whole, but there were almost as many generals as battalions in the march. The movement of the Guard was to be the signal for a general attack on the British front; the sorely shattered divisions of D'Erlon's wing were to advance on either side of the Charleroi road. The Guards themselves took forward with them a battery of guns; their left flank was covered by some squadrons of cuirassiers; then, to quote Houssaye, "the five battalions of the Guard advanced against the whole English army. They marched presenting arms, their lines perfect, as if for review at the Tuileries, superb and impassive."

Wellington's keen eye detected the preparations for the advance of the Guard. Napoleon believed that his opponent had no reserves—another example of the many false estimates that wrecked his fortune. But with Wellington a reserve—if possible, a hidden reserve—was the first rule of his art. "The great secret of battle," he said long afterwards, "is to have a reserve. I always had." And a fine proof of his tactical superiority throughout the whole battle is the fact that he was able to meet each onfall of the French with exactly that combination of force which ensured its defeat.

It is not clear whether he brought up Chassé's Dutch-Belgian brigades; there is some confusion on this point; but the Brunswick battalions were

moved from the left and pushed in front on Halkett's flank. Some Nassau brigades were drawn up in the rear of the Brunswickers. Vivian's brigade of light cavalry was placed behind the Nassauers; Vandeleur's brigade was stationed on his right; on his left were the fragments of the survivors of the heavy cavalry regiments. Adam's brigades were brought up from the right and placed at an angle inclined towards Hougoumont; on Adam's right was a battery of guns ready to strike the advancing column on the flank. Maitland's brigade of the Foot Guards, drawn somewhat back from the ridge, held the point on which the Old Guard seemed to be moving, and Bolton's battery, now in command of Napier, was placed so as to strike the head of the advancing column. Wellington, in a word, packed in the triangle formed by the three roads a very powerful force, though looked at from La Belle Alliance the ridge in front still seemed almost empty.

As a final preparation for the attack, Napoleon sent aides-de-camp along the whole front of his battle-line to announce that the force approaching from the east was that of Grouchy. It was a lie, of course; and Ney—to his honour be it said—protested indignantly against tricking the army with a lie. But for Napoleon truth or falsehood were simply weapons to be used with equal freedom as might be convenient; and this particular lie,

sent flying, loud-voiced, along the French army, certainly kindled a momentary wave of enthusiasm. Napoleon himself superintended the organisation of the attack, and dismissed the battalions on their adventure with a fierce gesture. But with the persistent ill-luck—or bad management—which marked the French tactics at Waterloo, the Old Guard was sent forward in the wrong formation, and in a wrong direction.

The battalions were formed in what is described as "hollow squares," a formation which, perhaps, reflects the effect the cavalry charge which wrecked D'Erlon's columns had produced on the imagination of the French army. They were in echelons, the right leading; between each echelon were two guns from the horse artillery of the Old Guard. The easiest advance to the British ridge lay along the Charleroi road; Wellington's line at that point was weakest. La Haye Sainte, now held by the French, would have covered the advance of the column to within sixty yards of the British line itself. But Ney took the column diagonally across the British front, past the flank of Hougoumont, against the British right centre. Here, again, the failure of D'Erlon's four great columns to the immediate right of La Haye Sainte perhaps influenced Ney in his choice of the point of attack; but the choice was, for the French, a disaster. Ney was moving on a path where his flank lay open to a

deadly counter-stroke, and he was striking the British line at the point where it was strongest.

It is still a matter of vehement dispute whether the Guard was formed in two columns or one. The balance of evidence seems to show that it was intended to form a single column; but at its advance, for want of effective leadership, it parted into two fragments, and each fragment moved on a slightly different course from the other.

As the column disentangled itself from the general mass of the French army, and the great bearskin caps became visible moving down the slope, the whole French attack along the British front flamed up into new intensity. With a sort of slow and dogged majesty the long, drawn-out oblong of the Guards crept up the slope towards the British ridge. As the tempest of shot from Napier's guns in its immediate front smote it, the great column seemed to shiver through its whole length. Ney's horse was killed—the fifth shot under him that day; but he disentangled himself, rose, sword in hand, and pushed on side by side with Friant.

The Guard formed a broad mass almost inky black in tint. They came on, as one who watched their advance described it, "at a kind of tripping step," their officers at their sides with waving swords, a cluster of mounted men at their head, shouting like the rank and file. The British guns tore

jagged and dreadful lines through their whole length, but never arrested their swing nor stopped their advance. In the curious silence that for a moment hushed the shouts as Maitland's Guards and Napoleon's veterans, at last face to face, stared at each other through the smoke, the British soldiers could see that their opponents were bronze-faced veterans, with fierce eyes and bristling moustaches, nursed in war, familiar with battle, foes to be dreaded.

The Guard was now advancing into a sort of concave of fire, but nothing checked its steady march. It came on with what seemed to be the resistless approach of an embodied fate. Many of its leaders fell, but still it came on. The ridge before it seemed to be empty. "They could see dimly through the smoke," says Siborne, "only the cocked hats of a few mounted officers"; one of those cocked hats, as it happened, covering the head of Wellington himself.

Maitland's Guards were lying down in ranks, when suddenly Wellington called out—not "Up, Guards, and at 'em!" as one venerable tradition relates, but—"Stand up, Guards"; and suddenly across what a moment before had seemed the empty ridge, there stretched the red line of the British Guards nearly 1500 strong, and drawn up three deep.

"With their high bearskin caps," as an officer in the Guards says, "the French appeared to the British through the smoky

haze like a corps of giants bearing down upon us. Arrived within eighty yards of us (on the following morning I measured the distance which separated their dead from ours) they halted, and for a moment stood as if amazed at our effrontery in offering opposition to their onward movement." [1]

But the muskets of the Guards had risen to their shoulders, and again and yet again they poured upon the French their dreadful volleys. A convulsive shock seemed to run through the column of bearskin caps as that blast of lead swept through it; its outer ranks became a mere distracted frieze of stumbling bodies. The French shot fiercely and fast in reply, but their front was narrow; it was a duel betwixt 75 muskets and 500. The regiments on the right of the British Guards—the 33rd and 69th—were by this time firing on the French column. The Old Guard attempted to deploy; its officers, with waving swords and wild gestures, strove to hurry the movement; but the ranks of the French were broken, men stumbled over the bodies of their fallen comrades. The whole column seemed to quiver. From its centre and rear the files were firing their muskets into space, and that was a sure sign of a column at the point of disintegration. Lord Saltoun cried, "Now is the time, boys!" and the British Guards, with level bayonets, charged home on the French. They broke, packs and weapons were flung down, all order was lost, the whole mass was driven in

[1] "Waterloo Letters," p. 176.

confusion down the slope, the British following fiercely.

As the wrecked battalions—by this time little better than a mob—were driven back, they swept past the flank of the second column—or fragment of the original column—now moving up steadily; and, at the call of their officers, the British halted. They, too, were breathless and disordered by their charge, and fell back at speed, and in some confusion, to the ridge, but promptly fell into line again.

The second segment—or, as it is sometimes called, the left column—of the Old Guard was coming coolly and resolutely up the slope. It was farther to the left than the first segment of the column, and its movement brought it within stroke of perhaps the most capable officer and the strongest regiment at that moment under Wellington's command. There has been endless debate over the part played by the 52nd at this stage of the battle. Colborne, who was a soldier of the finest type, and at the same time the most modest of men, always held that the 52nd received less than justice in Wellington's report of the battle; and Leake, who carried the colours of the 52nd that day, has written two solid volumes on things in general, and on the defeat of the Old Guard in particular, in which he claims for the 52nd what it may be suspected is even more than their just

credit for the part they took in the struggle. But, on any reading of the facts, the stroke of Colborne, with the 52nd, was a magnificent piece of soldiership, and brought the whole battle to a swift and final issue.

The 52nd was a regiment of great fame; it had on the morning of the battle over 1000 men in its ranks; and, as it had been in reserve during most of the battle, it had, as yet, suffered no great loss. The left column of the Old Guard, now moving past the flank of the 52nd, offered to Colborne an opportunity he was quick to see, and swift to use. He took his regiment forward at quick time until his left was in line with the leading company of the Old Guard; the order "Right shoulders forward!" was given; the left company marked time, the long front of the regiment swung round till it was parallel with the flank of the French column. "What are you about to do?" Colborne was asked by his brigadier, Adam, who just then rode up. "To make that column feel our fire," was the answer.

Wellington and a group round him watched the sudden advance and wheel of the 52nd. Hill afterwards described it as "one of the most beautiful advances" he had ever seen. It was an advance without orders, it is true; but one who stood near Wellington, and watched his face, has described how the anxious aspect it had worn while

the Old Guard came on with such grim resolution, melted as he watched Colborne's swift advance and skilful evolution.

The sudden appearance of a body so formidable threatening its flank brought the column of the Old Guard to a halt; its outer files wheeled so as to face the 52nd, and opened a hurried but deadly fire upon it, and nearly 140 men of Colborne's regiment fell under that fire in less than five minutes. But every man in the 52nd, down to the youngest private, realised the greatness of the moment. They had caught the far-famed Imperial Guard at a disadvantage. Directly the wheeling movement was complete, the long front of the 52nd poured a deadly volley on the French column, and instantly charged with the bayonet. The whole mass seemed to disintegrate under the shock of that fierce charge, the resolute push of so wide a front of bayonets. Its rear, still keeping some order, fell back, but its head broke into flight. Colborne took his regiment forward without halting, and the unhappy French column, rent with musketry, stabbed with charging bayonets, was driven—not down the slope to its starting-point, but—across the slope eastward, a portent to two armies, a proclamation of defeat, of defeat past remedy—intelligible at a glance to the whole of Napoleon's army.

How that spectacle must affect the French army

Wellington with the swift instinct of a great soldier divined. It would be accepted as an omen of disaster. It would arrest every attack; it would put the whole army in a mood for retreat. He shut his telescope suddenly, and exclaimed to the officers about him, "Now, every man must advance." Then riding to the edge of the ridge—exactly at what point is doubtful—he stood clear of the smoke, and, hat in hand, with a sort of inspired gesture, pointing forward, he gave the signal to advance. Every battered square, every shot-torn battalion saw the signal, interpreted it, translated it into exultant shouts, and at once pushed forward over the ridge. They had stood, and fought, had been shot at, and had died for hours, hedged in with strangling smoke, imprisoned in almost utter blackness. But now the moment had come for striking back at their foe.

Kincaid tells how, for hours, he could see nothing before him but a wall of smoke, out of which broke incessantly the red flames of French muskets, and nothing on either side but the bodies of slain men and horses. After hours of that fierce combat in smoke and darkness, suddenly, far to the right, was heard the sound of a cheer. It grew nearer, louder. The much-enduring battalions caught it up eagerly. Some warlike instinct told the men it was the signal to advance. The line closed in; its front was "dressed," and at

the quick-step it went forward, driving the French before it. A few steps took it out of the obscuring smoke, and the whole landscape of the battle broke on the gaze of the men. "It was," says Kincaid, "a fine summer's evening, just before sunset. The French were flying in one confused mass. The British lines were seen in close pursuit, and, in admirable order, as far as the eye could reach to the right, while the plain to the left was filled with Prussians."

Sir Harry Smith graphically describes the moment when the fate of the battle was decided:

"The enemy," he says, "had made his last great effort on our centre, and the field was so enveloped in smoke that nothing was discernible. The firing ceased on both sides, and we on the left knew that one party or the other was beaten. This was the most anxious moment of my life. In a few seconds we saw the red-coats in the centre as stiff as rocks, and the French columns retiring rapidly, and there was such a British shout as rent the air. We all felt then to whom the day belonged. . . . At this moment I saw the Duke, with only one staff officer remaining, galloping furiously to the left. I rode out to meet him. 'Who commands here?' 'Generals Kempt and Lambert, my lord.' 'Desire them to get into a column of companies of battalions, and move on immediately.' I said, 'In which direction, my lord?' 'Right ahead, to be sure.' I never saw his Grace so animated."

On the Charleroi road Colborne, cool even in the passion and excitement of such a moment, halted to re-form the 52nd. The covering sergeants were ordered out, and the line was being

[1] "Autobiography of Sir Harry Smith," vol. i. pp. 271–2.

dressed, when Wellington rode up. "Well done, Colborne," he said, "well done! Go on; don't give them time to rally." And then, for another half mile, Colborne tumbled that great column of French veterans athwart the British front. Though broken and defeated, the French Guards still maintained a sort of furious, not to say disgusted, courage. "I shall never forget," says an English officer, "some of the French Guards turning to look at their enemies; some lingering rays of the sun falling on their faces through the smoke, now nearly cleared away, threw a lurid kind of glare upon their countenances, and gave them a fierce look, particularly when the gleam from the musketry assisted."

The French everywhere read aright the signal of defeat offered by the spectacle of the wrecked battalions of the Old Guard. The cry of "The Guard gives way" rose everywhere. Napoleon, at that moment, was occupied in forming into a column of attack the three remaining battalions of the Guard, when, looking up, he caught sight of the wreck of Ney's force. Part was falling back in fragments towards La Belle Alliance, and part was being pushed in confusion by the 52nd across the Brussels road. "*La garde recule*," he muttered. At the same moment he saw his whole line of battle fall to pieces. The hill-slopes below La Haye Sainte, and to the east of it, were covered with

French infantry retreating in disorder; the woods round Hougoumont were pouring forth flying troops.

Wellington, with that wise economy of effective force which marked his whole conduct of the fight, had still in hand some good cavalry, the brigades of Vivian and Vandeleur. They were ordered not to attack any infantry squares unless they were visibly shaken, but to destroy all the French cavalry they met. Vivian took his squadrons down the slope, Maitland's Guards cheering as they rode past their front. They broke in succession some squadrons of lancers and carabineers, and then rode into the crowd of flying infantry. Vandeleur, riding down the slope farther to the east, broke up some bodies of formed infantry, and captured a battery, the last of the French guns in position.

"We were riding in all directions," says one of Vivian's staff, "at parties who were attempting to make their escape, and in many instances had to cut down men who had taken up their arms after having in the first instance laid them down. From the appearance of the enemy lying together for safety, they were a mass some feet in height, calling out, from the injury of one pressing upon another, and from the horses stamping upon them."

Napoleon tried to arrest the mad rout. He planted in the road three squares of his Guards, hoping to check the torrent of flying men. Major Howard and a squadron of the 10th rode gallantly on one of these, failed to break it, and suffered heavy loss, Howard himself falling. Another square

was charged and broken. It was commanded by Cambronne, who, as a matter of fact, did not utter the famous saying about "The Guard dies, but never surrenders." When the square was broken, Cambronne himself surrendered to Halkett in person, who proceeded to carry his prisoner to his battalion. His horse was shot, and Cambronne seized the opportunity to escape. Halkett, however, pursued him, caught him by the neck, and put him in charge of a sergeant, who marched him off to the rear. In that mad scene of terror and flight the figure of Ney becomes visible for a moment with something of a heroic aspect. He stood bareheaded, his face blackened with powder, his uniform in rags. He held in his hand a broken sword, and as D'Erlon was swept by him in an eddy of the flying crowd, he cried, "D'Erlon, if you and I escape we shall both be hanged." He stopped a body of infantry as it went past him, and, wheeling them, tried to take them back into the fight. "Come," he said, "and see how a Marshal of France can die"; but it dissolved into flight about him.

By this time the Prussians had broken through Planchenoit. Ziethen was advancing from Smohain, the whole French right wing was rolling back disordered and broken. The British were on their rear, the Prussians on their flank, and the two jaws of the vice, says Houssaye, "closed on this terrified

and defenceless rabble which had once been the Imperial army." Two battalions of the Old Guard, the *élite* of the *élite*, kept their formation in that wild scene, and Napoleon himself rode into one of the squares. Presently he left it, and with Soult, Drouot, Lobau, and a handful of cavalry, rode ahead. Kellerman says that Napoleon "so completely lost his senses at this stage as neither to know the persons by whom he was surrounded, nor to understand what was said to him; he had to be led out of the fray in a state of perfect helplessness."

At some point in front of La Belle Alliance, or beyond it, Wellington and Blucher met, and the old "hussar" general, with the spectacle of Napoleon's entire army in wreck and flight about him, embraced and kissed the somewhat disconcerted Wellington with a rapture almost too great for words. "*Mein lieber kamarade*," he exclaimed, and then "*Quelle affaire!*" which, says Wellington, "was pretty much all the French he knew." A regiment of Prussian infantry had halted at that moment to re-form its ranks, and they broke into a storm of strong, deep-throated music; it was Luther's hymn, "Now thank we all our God."

The British were exhausted by ten hours' fighting, and Blucher volunteered to take up the pursuit with his troops. He summoned the commander of each corps, and ordered them to pursue the

enemy as long as they had a man or a horse that could stand. All night long the tumult of the great flight rolled southwards, the Prussians hanging on the rear of the flying host with unpitying fierceness. Earth has seldom witnessed such a spectacle of wreck, and panic, and distracted flight. Gneisenau led the pursuit at the head of the Prussian light horse; the infantry had fallen behind, but still the fierce horsemen rode amongst the flying French, slaying at will. When these, in turn, grew weary, drummer boys were mounted on horses, and sent forward to whip, with clatter of drum, the flying army into fresh panic.

The distraction of the flight reached its climax, perhaps, at Genappe, where the long, steep, and winding street led to a bridge over the Dyle, which, at that date, was not eight feet wide. On this thread-like bridge the flying soldiers, mad with fear, perished in multitudes. Beyond the bridge the Prussians overtook Napoleon's carriage. At the sound of the hoarse Prussian hurrahs Napoleon had leaped from his carriage, scrambled upon a horse, and galloped off into the darkness, leaving Gneisenau's hussars to plunder his wardrobe. Unmounted diamonds to the value of a million francs were found stitched into the lining of an extra uniform. They were booty from Spain; and there is a gleam of the Nemesis of history in the fact that Napoleon had to part company with the

last of all his Spanish gains in that distracted night-scene on the road beyond Genappe.

Beyond Genappe the pursuit was still fierce. At Charleroi is a bridge thirty-eight yards in length and only eight feet wide; this was blocked by the French treasury waggons, and the officer in charge broke the army-chest open and distributed to the soldiers of the flying escort as many bags of gold as each could carry. Napoleon in his flight crossed the battlefield at Quatre Bras. It was still strewn with the unburied slain, nearly 4000 corpses stripped quite naked by plunderers; and with what feelings Napoleon in the darkness of the night rode through those acres of the slain may be guessed. He drew rein for a moment in that field of the dead, and one who stood near him records how "his face was pale as wax and the tears ran down his cheeks." At Charleroi the village was crowded with the wounded from Ligny; and thus across the useless battlefields of that terrible campaign Napoleon fled on his way to Paris—and beyond it to St. Helena.

After his interview with Blucher, Wellington turned back and rode slowly to his quarters. A few officers rode beside him, and Jackson, in his "Notes of a Staff Officer," tells how he watched the group. It moved at a walk; the Duke was silent, sombre, dejected. That tiny cluster, riding slowly in the darkness across the battlefield, says

Jackson, wore rather the aspect of a little funeral train than that of victors in one of the most important battles ever fought. Wellington sat down in the little inn at Waterloo to his supper, a sad and silent man. Every time the door opened he looked up eagerly, hoping to see some of his staff enter, but none came. Of his whole staff numbering over forty all but two were killed or wounded. Once or twice during the meal he lifted his hands in a sort of convulsive clasp, and said, "Thank God I've met him."

At five o'clock in the morning Dr. Hume came to his room with the list of the killed and wounded amongst his staff. Wellington was asleep, but woke, his face still black with the smoke of the battle. As Hume read the list, name after name, Wellington clasped his hand, and Hume felt the hot tears fall upon it. The "Iron Duke" could pay his fallen comrades at least the sad tribute of reluctant and unaccustomed tears. Later in the day Wellington rode into Brussels, and when he met Lady Mornington and her daughter, again the tears ran from his eyes. "The next great misfortune," he said, "to losing a battle is to gain such a victory as this." Writing to Lady Frances Webster, he said, "The finger of Providence has been on me, and I escaped unhurt." "I never fought such a battle before," he said to Lord Fitzroy Somerset, "and I hope I shall never fight such another."

The slaughter of Waterloo was great. No accurate return of the losses of the French army exists, but its total of killed, wounded, and prisoners was not less than 30,000. Wellington's losses reached 15,000, Blucher's nearly 7000. The purely British regiments lost 6036 out of a total force of less than 24,000; the Prussians lost 6998, but this was out of a total force of nearly 90,000. In proportion to the numbers engaged, the strictly British loss was nearly four times that of the Prussians. The losses of individual regiments in some cases were startling. Thus the Royals, out of a total of 395 men, lost in killed and wounded 197, or more than 49 per cent. of the men who went into the battle. The Greys, out of 391 men, lost 199, or over 50 per cent.; the 6th Dragoons, out of 397 men, lost 217, or more than 54 per cent. The infantry suffered worse than the cavalry. Thus the third battalion of the Guards, out of 1064, had 604 killed and wounded, or over 56 per cent.; the 1st Foot, out of 627 men, lost 362, or 57 per cent.; the 73rd, out of 568 men, lost 336, or 59 per cent.; the 92nd, out of 621 men, lost 400, or 64 per cent.; the 27th, out of 698, lost 478 men, or 68 per cent. The 79th suffered worse than any other regiment on the field; out of 675 men, 475 were killed or wounded, a total of 71 per cent.

And yet, in spite of such losses, these regiments

held their ground. "I never saw the British infantry," says Wellington, "behave so well."

The battlefield, when the next dawn broke over it, offered a tragical sight. Sir Harry Smith says it was "packed as thickly with the dead throughout its whole extent as the great breach at Badajos." It offered, indeed, a sort of map of the battle; all its passion, its ebb and flow, its attacks and defeats, were inscribed on the soil, as in dreadful hieroglyphics, with the dead and the wounded. On the British ridge the slain infantry lay still in squares, and on each front a far-stretching fringe of dead men and horses who had charged them. Round the shattered limbers of each battery of guns lay the dead gunners. On the eastern side of the Charleroi road lay, drawn in human corpses, the outline of D'Erlon's wrecked columns, with a broader spray of dead and wounded stretching right down the slope to the valley where the British cavalry had wrecked them. Panic, as well as death, had written its signature here. At one place there were nearly 2000 muskets, all laid in regular lines, as if on parade; their owners had laid them down in the act of surrender. The orchard, the garden, the woods of Hougoumont were congested with slain men, French and English. On the slope to the east of Hougoumont the story of the attack of the Old Guard was written in strange characters; the blue

coats and fur-caps lying thick, almost in piles, at the head where the volleys of the British Guards had stopped the column; where the British Guards had stood, a ragged line of red-coats showed that even in defeat Napoleon's Old Guard were formidable. Where the 52nd had smashed in on the flank of the second column was shown by the long swathe of the dead, and for half a mile across the slope of the hill towards the Brussels road stretched that broad, muddled ribbon of the slain.

CHAPTER X

THE LITERATURE OF WATERLOO

"Thank God I have met him."—WELLINGTON, *of Napoleon, after Waterloo.*

WATERLOO is the one battle about which Englishmen are never tired of reading, and it is easy to see some, at least, of the causes which explain the undying interest of this particular fight. It is a battle which decided great issues. "It has done more," said Wellington himself, "to secure that which is the end of all battles—the world's peace—than any other battle in history." It was the closing scene in the drama of the Twenty Years' War, the climax of that tremendous struggle. The dread of Napoleon, which had oppressed the imagination of the world like a nightmare for years, disappeared in its smoke.

But there are other reasons which help to give Waterloo an undying interest. It is the last battle of historic scale and importance in which British soldiers have fought, and no later battle has effaced its memory. Its literature is curiously abundant. It has a more distinct physiognomy, and is there-

fore more intelligible, than most battles. The average Briton does not love fighting for its own sake, but if he must fight, there is distinctly one type of combat he prefers and admires. He likes to see his enemy. Battles such as those in South Africa, where 5000 Boers, with repeating rifles and smokeless powder, could hold a line of twenty-five miles, do not appeal to the British imagination. At Magersfontein the Highlanders shot, and were shot at, for hours, and never saw their enemy. It was like fighting an army of ghosts; and while the British soldier will take his chance of being killed cheerfully enough, he does not like being killed by enemies who are as intangible as spectres. The Briton, too, hardly understands or admires a fight which is won by subtleties of tactics, or by complex "movements," which it needs the intelligence and memory of experts to comprehend. If there must be a fight, he prefers one in which the conditions are fairly equal, and the issues are determined by straightforward hitting, and by the quality of endurance.

Now Waterloo satisfies, at all these points, the British ideal of a battle. The field had no vagueness born of geographical space. Its area was extraordinarily small, extending, say, two and a half miles east and west, and 1400 yards north and south; and on that contracted stage two armies of nearly 70,000 men each tried their

strength against each other for the greater part of a long summer day. The battle itself was a plain straight-out "pounding" match. "They came on," Wellington wrote, "in the old way—in column—and we met them in the old way—in line." To an inquirer who asked why the British won at Waterloo, Wellington translated the battle into homely terms. "They pommelled us," he said, "and we pommelled them. We pommelled the hardest, and so we won."

Waterloo, again, may be described as one of the most equally balanced fights known to history. There was on both sides the finest courage. Race-characteristics in the fighters, of course, told; it was, on the part of the French, courage of the temperature of flame; for the British it was cool in temper and unyieldingly stubborn in fibre. But in both it was of the highest quality. Wellington himself may be quoted as a witness at this point. Creevey was, perhaps, the first civilian who saw him after Waterloo. He was at Brussels, and at eleven o'clock on the morning of the 19th saw Wellington, who had just ridden in from the battlefield.

"The Duke," he says, "beckoned to me with his finger to come up. He made a variety of observations in his short, natural, blunt way, but with the greatest gravity all the time, without the least approach to triumph or joy. 'It has been a serious business,' he said, 'a d——d nice thing, the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life.' Then as he walked about he praised greatly those Guards who kept Hougoumont against the repeated attacks of the French, and then he praised all our

troops, uttering repeated expressions of astonishment at our men's courage. He repeated so often it being so 'nice' a thing, so 'nearly run' a thing, that I asked him if the French fought better than he had ever seen them do before. 'No,' he said, 'they have always fought the same since I first saw them at Vimiero. By G——, I do not think it would have done if I had not been there.' There was nothing like boasting in the observation in the way he made it," says Creevey, "it only meant that the battle was so hardly and equally fought that nothing but confidence in the army and in himself as their general could have brought them through. Nothing could do a conqueror more honour than his gravity and seriousness at the loss of life he had sustained . . . his admission of his great danger, than the justice he did his enemy."[1]

The fact, again, that Waterloo is, in a sense, the most intelligible of battles, helps to explain its hold on the general memory. Its physiognomy hides no mysteries. Napoleon's tactics might almost be condensed into a sentence. Hougoumont was attacked in order to tempt Wellington to weaken his centre—or to divert his attention from his centre—on which an overwhelming infantry attack was about to be launched. Blucher, at Ligny, had fallen into exactly that trap. But Wellington was too cool a general to be tricked in this fashion. He held Hougoumont through the whole day with 1200 Grenadiers and Coldstreams, and was able to use all his reserves in meeting the other attacks on his line. Napoleon's strategy, indeed, recoiled upon himself. The attack on Hougoumont absorbed almost the whole of his

[1] Creevey, p. 237.

right wing, with the result that the 1200 Coldstreams and Grenadiers practically cancelled as a fighting force in the battle an entire army corps.

When Napoleon's infantry had failed, both at Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte, his calvary was flung into the fight, and for two hours a sea of furious horsemen—lancers, cuirassiers, dragoons of every tint—flooded the British ridge, and eddied round the tiny, stubborn islets of red-coated, or blue-coated, soldiers. But the cavalry attack, in turn, failed. There was a gleam of hope for the French when La Haye Sainte was captured, and Wellington's battle-line seemed to be shattered. The Prussians, by this time, were pressing on Napoleon's right flank, but their advance for the moment was arrested, and the Old Guard—fighters who never yet had failed—were launched on the British position. They met their match, however, in the British Guards, and in Colborne's 52nd. Then came the general advance of the British line, the Prussians broke through Planchenoit, and Waterloo was won.

Now all these features are broad, clear, and arresting; they stamp themselves on the general memory. What the popular mind unjustly lets slip is the effect of the Prussian advance on the fortunes of the day, an effect not to be measured either by the exact moment Blucher's columns made their appearance, or the amount of actual

fighting they did. At three o'clock they drew Lobau, with 10,000 infantry, from Napoleon's reserves; later, they drew two divisions of the Old Guard. If these had been launched at Wellington's centre after La Haye Sainte was captured, Waterloo might have been a British defeat.

This great battle, in physiognomy so simple, in historical results so tremendous, can be seen, in a sense, as under a microscope. The books written about it constitute almost a separate literature. Almost every scrap of personal "recollections" about it is preserved; memoirs, journals, correspondence abound. It is true these individual records and memoirs only give us battle scenes as looked at through so many pin-holes. The landscape is missed. All we have is a momentary vision of reeling columns, galloping horses, the white smoke of guns, the rush of a section of a line on the fragment of a column, &c.

Even Wellington's own "Recollections" and "Conversations" are to be received with caution. He forgot, or is misreported. The "recollections" of Lord Ellesmere or of Lord Stanhope are reports of after-dinner talk, often not written down at the moment. They are interesting, but they are not evidence, still less are they history. Wellington in these conversations often contradicts himself. Thus Stanhope makes him say that he was always sure of winning the battle. But in a conversation

at Walmer, preserved in Lady Salisbury's Journal for 1896, and published in Sir Herbert Maxwell's "Life of Wellington," the Duke says that "even after the defeat of the Old Guard I was by no means secure of the victory, nor till long afterwards." He told Stanhope that La Haye Sainte was captured by the French at two o'clock, whereas it was not captured till six o'clock. It was lost, he says, through the absence of a door on the front opposite the British line; whereas there *was* a door. Even in his despatch describing the battle, and written almost before the sound of its guns had died away, Wellington succeeds in being inaccurate. What risks of inaccuracy must there have been in his after-dinner gossip, say, twenty-five years later, and reported at second-hand. Yet this casual, fragmentary, unverified, and often inaccurate literature is of extraordinary interest, and its existence has helped to keep Waterloo alive in popular memory.

The tactics on both sides during the short, swift-moving, and terrific compaign have been studied under a microscope, and keenly criticised, for well-nigh a century, but the critics wage furious civil war amongst themselves. Wellington, Napoleon, Blucher, are all accused of blunders, but the critics do not agree as to what the blunders were.

Napoleon, beyond doubt, gained an advantage over his opponents in the first stages of the cam-

paign. The subtlety of his combinations, the secrecy and speed of his movements were admirable; and but for the failure to utilise D'Erlon's corps, wandering aimlessly betwixt two battlefields and firing a shot on neither, he might have made Blucher's defeat at Ligny overwhelming, or have driven Wellington back with loss to Genappe. But that Napoleon allowed a body of 20,000 good troops to drift into sight at Ligny and drift out again, is a sufficient reproach to his generalship.

And it cannot be denied that Napoleon brought ruin upon himself during the four days' campaign by want of decision at critical moments, by spasms of mysterious and helpless delay, by his trick of acting on guesses—and on wrong guesses—as though they were certainties.

A world of literature—congested, it may be added, with lies—has gathered about the part Grouchy played in this campaign; but the broad facts are clear. Napoleon despatched Grouchy with 33,000 men to pursue and destroy Blucher's defeated battalions; but he despatched him in the wrong direction, and with totally mistaken instructions. If Blucher was, as Napoleon believed, thoroughly demoralised, 33,000 men were too many to pursue him; if he was not, they were too few. And Napoleon, no more than Grouchy, read Blucher's daring and loyal purpose to march at all costs from Wavre to Waterloo, and join Wellington there.

That Napoleon blundered in the actual tactics of Waterloo is admitted. He wasted time before beginning the battle, when every hour was worth 10,000 men to him. What was meant to be a mere demonstration against Hougoumont was allowed to become a struggle which absorbed an entire army corps. D'Erlon's attack was that of infantry without sufficient cavalry support; Ney's attack, late in the afternoon, was that of cavalry without infantry support; and, by the time the Old Guard advanced, Napoleon had used up—or had permitted his generals to use up—his reserves so completely that he could not adequately support its attack with either cavalry or infantry.

Ney, after Waterloo, declaimed against "the faults and extravagances of this campaign"; he complains of the "false movements" and "bad arrangements" at Waterloo itself. Napoleon himself, in his letter on the battle, after saying that after the cavalry charge "the battle was gained; we occupied all the positions which the enemy occupied at the outset of the battle," goes on to say that "a battle terminated, a day of false manœuvres rectified, and the greatest success ensured for the next day—all was lost by a movement of panic terror." But who was responsible for "a day of false manœuvres"?

Houssaye, indeed, defends with much energy Napoleon's conduct of the battle; but his defence

is nothing short of an indictment. Napoleon, he says, wished to begin the action early in the morning, but postponed it till nearly noon; and this delay, Houssaye argues with more or less of truth, "saved the English army." But Napoleon alone was responsible for the delay. He took bad advice; he permitted himself to be in a mood of fatal ignorance as to Bulow's approach. He attacked the British line, Houssaye admits, at the wrong point; he lost control of his generals; he permitted D'Erlon's columns to advance in a formation which meant ruin. "Why," asks Houssaye, "did not Ney shatter the walls of La Haye Sainte with his guns before flinging his infantry upon them?" But it may be asked, Why did not Napoleon direct this to be done?" "Without preparations, without support, without orders, and before the appointed time, Ney flung the French cavalry on the British ridge, assailing unbroken infantry; but here, again, Napoleon allowed this fatal error to be committed. Ney, according to Napoleon, "would forget in the heat of the action any troops which were not under his eyes." But Napoleon, too, forgot. The attack of the Old Guard was made in a wrong formation, on a wrong point, and without supports. The French, in a word, in their attacks on the English, "acted spasmodically; awkwardly at first, then rashly, at last desperately." What an indictment of their generals!

It is a French witness who says that the Emperor at Waterloo was plunged "in a species of apathy." They are French witnesses who declare that Napoleon was "asleep" at intervals during the battle. Against this Houssaye claims that "Napoleon never exercised commandership more efficiently, and never was his action more direct." But in the very next sentence he says that

"seeing all his attacks failing, his generals frittering away his splendid troops, his last army melting through their hands . . . he lost his resolution and his confidence, hesitated . . . waited for the lucky moment, let it pass, and did not dare in time to risk all in order to save all."

This surely cannot be described as representing an "efficient" generalship.

It can hardly be doubted that Napoleon's health was unequal to the strain of the four days' campaign. His constitution had been sapped by the opposite extremes of hardship and luxury. What an interval, for example, parts the severities of the retreat from Moscow, from the almost Eastern luxury—with a touch in it of Eastern vice—of the Tuileries. Napoleon was as formidable in the closet as ever, but not in the field. His powers knew strange arrests — mysterious failures that came and went like breaths of paralysis.

Napoleon, it is worth remembering, spent his last days at St. Helena in the business of writing

memoirs which are congested with lies; but amongst the many explanations which he offered of his defeat at Waterloo, one deserves to be remembered for its gigantic ingratitude. Waterloo was lost, he said, "*because no one did his duty there.*" And yet tens of thousands of gallant men laid down their lives for Napoleon on that field.

To say that Wellington committed errors "is," says Napier, "only to say that he made war." But the only serious errors in the Waterloo campaign of which he is accused are, in substance, two: First, it is said he did not move quickly enough when the French came across the Sambre, and, as a result, Quatre Bras was insufficiently held, and disaster was only escaped here by chance; second, he is blamed for leaving 17,000 troops idle at Hal when they were sorely needed at Waterloo. The two faults, if they were faults, had a common root. Wellington misread Napoleon's strategy. He believed he would advance by the Hal road, striking at the British right. To the day of his death Wellington held that Napoleon *ought* to have moved on Hal rather than on Charleroi; and it needs an extraordinary amount of intellectual courage to decide that, on a question of strategy, Wellington was wrong. It is clear Wellington believed himself to be most vulnerable on his right, if only because that was the point where concentration would take longest.

Houssaye reckons that three days were necessary for each of the two armies to concentrate at their common centre, and double that time to concentrate either on the right wing of the British troops, or the left wing of the Prussians. Clausewitz has a yet more spacious computation. The armies, he says, "could not be concentrated on their point of union in less than four or five days." If these figures are correct, they justify the obstinacy with which Wellington kept guard at Hal on his right. For they show that by attacking the centre Napoleon was striking at the point where Blucher and Wellington could concentrate their forces in the shortest space of time. If he had moved on Brussels by Hal, he would have struck the allied forces at a point where their concentration was more difficult, and would cost more time. Wellington could not fall back towards the centre without surrendering his communications.

The actual facts, of course, show that Houssaye's estimate of the time it would take for Blucher and Wellington to concentrate, and, in a still higher degree, the estimate of Clausewitz, are wildly mistaken. Within twelve hours of the first musket-shot at Thuin, Blucher had 90,000 men in battle-line at Ligny. The news that the French were across the Sambre reached Wellington at 3.30 P.M. on the 15th; at 8 A.M. on the 16th, or within a little over sixteen hours—Wellington himself

says twelve hours—he had 40,000 men holding Ney at bay at Quatre Bras. Houssaye himself says, "Had not the battle of Ligny been fought, the concentration which commenced on the 14th for the Prussians, and on the night of the 15th for the English, would have been completed at noon on the 17th between Sombreffe and Quatre Bras."[1]

Wellington was, no doubt, slower than Blucher in setting his scattered divisions moving on some common point to meet the French advance. But he had worse information than Blucher, and the situation was for him more complex. Blucher was certain from the outset that he must concentrate on his right, for his left was beyond the reach of Napoleon's stroke; but Wellington to the last moment was uncertain whether he must concentrate on his right or on his left. Napoleon, of course, desired to keep his antagonist in exactly that state of mental doubt as to the direction from which the stroke was to come. If he could have produced such an effect by an effort of his will, he would have bred in Wellington's mind all those hesitations, that attitude of brooding, listening, meditative vigilance, which lay upon him during the two days before Napoleon took up his quarters at Fleurus. It is to be noted that all the intelligence which reached Wellington on the 15th lacked finality. They were, in substance, only outpost rumours, and

[1] "Waterloo," p. 335.

they were compatible with a movement on Wellington's right wing. And Wellington, in his own words, "would not move a corporal's guard till he was sure." He told Lord Fitzroy Somerset, "We ought to be able to beat the French, provided I do not make a false movement." He was determined not to move at all, rather than move to a wrong point, or on mistaken news.

As a matter of fact, it is still open to debate at what hour Wellington gave orders for his divisions to move. Did he do so on the afternoon of the 15th, and if so, when? In his Waterloo despatch Wellington wrote, "I had directed the whole army to march on Quatre Bras"; but when he did this remains a puzzle unsolved. It seems probable that three sets of orders were issued, but the third set was lost with Sir W. De Lancey's papers on the field of Waterloo. Five orders issued on that afternoon survive, collected from the officers to whom they were addressed, but three of them, as Sir Herbert Maxwell points out in his "Life of Wellington," relate to movements which were to be carried out on the 16th and 17th. Jackson, in his "Notes of a Staff Officer," says[1] that "at seven o'clock he was summoned to his chief's office 'to write out orders for the several divisions to march.'

The orderlies were Hussars mainly selected for their steadiness. Each was told the rate at which he was to proceed, the

[1] P. 12.

time of reaching the destination, and that it was his duty to bring back the cover of the despatch on which the officer receiving the despatch had to state the exact time of its delivery."

Lady De Lancey, again, in "A Week at Waterloo, in June, 1815," sheds some light on the puzzle of these orders. Her brief story is one of the most exquisite and moving pictures of human grief in literature. She had been a bride for only six weeks when her husband was appointed quarter-master-general of Wellington's army, and hurried to Brussels, taking her with him. She describes the happiness of her days there. "I used to sit and think with astonishment of my being transported into such a scene of happiness, so perfect, so unalloyed, feeling that I was entirely enjoying life, not a moment wasted." Her husband was mortally wounded by a cannon-ball at Wellington's side. Lady De Lancey tells how her husband about six o'clock on the 15th left her to dine at the Spanish ambassador's. She watched from the window till he was out of sight, and still sat watching, when an aide-de-camp rode up to ask where Sir William was dining. On learning, he galloped off, and "a few minutes after," she says, "I saw Sir William on the same horse galloping past to the Duke's, which is a few houses from ours. He dismounted and ran into the house, and left the horse in the middle of the street."

This was certainly long before ten o'clock at night, the first hour at which, according to many critics, Wellington received news that Napoleon in person was at Charleroi. Maurice,[1] indeed, says this was "towards twelve o'clock." The note of haste and of urgency in that incident—the use of the aide-de-camp's horse, the act of leaving it in the street while De Lancey "ran into the house"—all suggest something of urgent importance suddenly heard, or some great decision suddenly reached. Lady De Lancey goes on to say:

"About nine o'clock Sir William came in. He said, 'I shall be writing all night perhaps.' . . . He went to the office, and returned near twelve much fatigued. He went twice to the Duke's. The first time he found him standing over a map with Muffling in full dress uniform with orders and crosses; the Duke was in his slippers preparing to dress for the Duchess of Richmond's ball. About two, Sir William went again to the Duke's; he was sleeping soundly. At three all the troops were assembled in the park, and Sir William and I looked from the window seeing them all march off, so few to return."

It is clear from this that news had come of the utmost urgency, calling for a new set of orders, and these were sent out before twelve o'clock. These orders must have been those which changed the hour of the troops falling in for their march from 4 A.M. to 2 A.M.

War is a difficult art, and there is no campaign recorded in history that does not seem to be congested with blunders when studied in after years,

[1] *United Service Magazine*, 1850.

and by critics who sit remote from all confusion and peril, and are able to read all the factors of the problem.

But granted that Wellington was slow to move at first, and obstinate in his suspicion of Napoleon's intentions to strike at his right wing, yet in the later stages of the four days' campaign he showed magnificent soldiership. The cool and skilful retreat to Waterloo; his tactics throughout the whole fight; the sure vision with which he detected each coming attack; the instant, unfailing resource with which he met it; the unshaken courage with which he rode to and fro amongst his shot-torn squares bringing inspiration everywhere, are part of his title to undying fame. "His look and demeanour," says Jackson, "were always perfectly calm and composed, and he rarely spoke to any one unless to send a message or give an order; indeed, he generally rode quite alone—that is, no one was at his side—appearing unconscious even of the presence of his troops, while his eye kept scanning intently those of his opponent." He was watching that slope at Belle Alliance, with the black masses of the waiting French, their front a line of flashing guns; and, behind it all, the intellect of one of the greatest masters of war known to history. What stroke was about to break from that thundercloud? His presence on the battle-line everywhere stiffened the ranks of his wasted

battalions. "As his well-known cocked hat and hooked nose were recognised through the smoke, the word would run round the lines of some much-enduring square: 'Silence! Stand to your front. Here's the Duke!'"

Wellington himself was coolness incarnate, unhurried, undisturbed, his voice keeping its natural key, his eyes their cheerful and steadfast look. He drew up beside a square on which a French battery was firing with deadly effect. "Hard pounding this, gentlemen," he said; "we will see who can pound the longest." "Stand firm, my lads," was his address to another sorely buffeted square; "what will they say of this in England?" Again and again the men in the ranks asked to be let loose at the French. "Wait a little longer, my lads," was Wellington's steady answer, "and you shall have your wish."

CHAPTER XI

A GREAT SOLDIER

WHAT was the secret of Wellington's success? By what gifts, or art, did he achieve so much, in a space of time so brief, and under conditions so difficult? "With a little army," said Charras, "he did great things." The scale of his work was not realised at the time, and perhaps is hardly realised yet. "A man of great actions," says Hamley, "but small professions—a knight-errant without extravagance; a man of business whose career was a romance. Recalling the memory of mighty contests and of great successes, that good grey head, with its halo of former glories, stood amid the later times like the peak of a submerged world."

Wellington never talked in superlatives about himself. He could do great things, but would never talk about them as if they were great. To Creevey, the first civilian he met after Waterloo, he condensed the tremendous fight into one brief sentence of the homeliest prose: "Why," he said,

"I think we have done for 'em this time." His own part in the battle he described in syllables as few and as homely, and already quoted in these pages. "He talked about it," says Creevey, "in his short, natural, blunt way: 'The nearest run thing you ever saw in your life, . . .' uttering repeated expressions of astonishment at our men's courage. 'The French,' he said, 'fought well. They have always fought the same since I first saw them at Vimiero.' Then he added, 'By G——, *I do not think it would have done if I had not been there.*'" No doubt his single brain, on that terrible day, measured for the British the whole interval betwixt defeat and victory.

To Stanhope he explained the difference betwixt the performances of the French marshals and his own generals by saying, "Well, the fact is their soldiers got them into scrapes, mine always got me out." Another explanation he gave was that "they planned their campaigns just as you might make a splendid set of harness. It looks very well, and answers very well, until it gets broken, and then you are done for. Now I made my campaigns of ropes. If anything went wrong, I tied a knot, and went on." He meant, of course, that he adapted his strategy to facts, and to facts as they emerged. Napoleon, in the same way, was accustomed to say he "had no plans." He waited till facts emerged and were known, then he acted.

The terse and homely aphorisms into which Wellington was accustomed to condense the secret of a soldier's art are scattered through all his after-dinner talk. "The test of a great general," he said, "was to know when to retreat, and to dare to do it." Sometimes it needs more courage to retreat than to fight. Fraser says he used to attribute his success to "always being a quarter of an hour before he was expected."[1] Stanhope reports him as saying, "The reason I succeeded in my own campaigns is because I was always on the spot. I saw everything, and did everything, for myself."[2] In conversation, again, he said that "the secret of success consisted in the application of good sense to the circumstances of the moment and at the moment." Where else in literature can be found the explanation of a career so splendid, offered in terms so prosaic!

One great soldier, if generously minded, can always be trusted to interpret another with insight, and two such soldiers may be quoted—William Napier, who saw Wellington close at hand, fought under his command, and has written the story of his victories in undying prose; and Lord Roberts, himself a great and successful soldier, who has studied Wellington as seen through the perspective of a century, and written the story of his rise.

[1] "Words of Wellington," p. 37.
[2] "Conversations of the Duke of Wellington," p. 264.

Napier's description of Wellington is written with characteristic force:

"Iron hardihood of body, a quick and sure vision, a grasping mind, untiring power of thought, and the habit of laborious minute investigation and arrangement—all these qualities he possessed, and with them that most rare faculty of coming to prompt and sure conclusions on sudden emergencies. This is the certain mark of a master-spirit in war; without it a commander may be distinguished, he may be a great man, he cannot be a great captain; where troops nearly alike in arms and knowledge are opposed, the battle generally turns upon the decision of the moment."[1]

That Wellington had all these qualities is certain; but what Napier calls that "most rare faculty" of meeting a sudden emergency with decision quick, and sure, and adequate, "the certain mark of a master-spirit in war," means something more than a swift decision of the will. It means the instant recollection of all the facts of the case; the swift judgment upon them of the clear, combining brain; the power to assess at a glance, and with absolute accuracy, all the forces in the problem. Wellington himself has described the process his mind went through at such a moment:

"There is," he told Lady Salisbury, "a curious thing that one feels sometimes; when you are considering a subject, suddenly a whole train of reasoning comes before you like a flash of light: you see it all" (moving his hand as if something appeared before him, his eye with its brightest expression), "yet it takes you

[1] "History of the Peninsular War," vol. vi. p. 198.

perhaps two hours to put on paper all that has occurred to your mind in an instant. Every part of the subject, the bearings of all its parts upon each other, and all the consequences, are there before you."[1]

To describe that strange and rare power as "genius" leaves it without explanation. The word "genius," like the X of mathematics, is only the symbol of the unknown. In Wellington's case the process he describes is the act of a mind disciplined by constant and intense use to answer the challenge of the moment, and to make all its resources available for the need of the moment. Wellington had not to recall with an effort all the necessary facts; they reported themselves automatically. He had not to climb step by step up some ladder of conscious logic to the height of a great determination. He reached it under the pressure of a great crisis, by a process almost as unconsciously as swift as an instinct.

Lord Roberts does not analyse the constituents of Wellington's power, but he assesses it in very spacious terms. "Wellington," he says, as a general, "stands in the very first rank, equal, if not superior, to Napoleon himself." He did not dazzle mankind as Napoleon did; he had a less vivid imagination, but "he excelled him in that coolness of judgment which Napoleon himself described as the foremost quality in a general."

All the familiar comparisons betwixt Napoleon

[1] Salisbury MSS., quoted by Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. ii. p. 112.

and Wellington, as far as personal qualities are concerned, are, of course, made useless by the totally different conditions under which they lived. Napoleon had absolute power. He was his own Prime Minister and Cabinet. He could call great armies into existence by a stroke of his pen; he chose his instruments at will. The fortunes of every soldier in his armies, from the man in the ranks up to his marshals, hung on his word. He was responsible only to himself. Wellington, on the other hand, had an army of tiniest dimensions and of mixed nationalities, and, as far as British troops were concerned, held his command on very hard conditions. "I knew," he said, "that if I ever lost 500 men without the clearest necessity I should be brought upon my knees to the bar of the House of Lords. I could not take risks."[1] And over his own army—over its numbers, its supplies, its rewards and punishments—he had very limited power. "I wish," he wrote to one of his generals, "I had it in my power to give you well-clothed troops, or to hang those who ought to have given them their clothing"; but he did not possess that power. "I," he wrote, "who command the largest army that has ever been employed against the enemy for many years, have not even the power of making a corporal."[2] "With the largest concern to manage that has lately been entrusted to any

[1] Stanhope, 41. [2] "Despatches," vol. vi. p. 304.

officer in the British army, and with the heaviest responsibility that ever was placed upon any, I have not," he writes again, "the power of promoting a man of any rank or description whatever."[1] It is absurd to compare the achievements of a general with power so limited, and working under conditions so restricted, with those of Napoleon, who had at his call the resources, not of one nation, but of many, and who owed neither explanation nor obedience to any one.

Lord Roberts, however, goes on to say that "while Wellington has been greatly underrated as a general, he has been somewhat overrated as a man."

"That Wellington was honourable, straightforward, resolute, and patriotic, none can deny, but he was by nature reserved and unsympathetic, perhaps a little selfish. There appears to be no instance in his military career of his adopting a course where his duty was opposed to his own interests, or of his being called upon to sacrifice the latter in order to carry out the former."

Now, as far as human opinion could have affected him, that judgment would have been resented by Wellington himself as both cruel and unjust. And, for a man of so generous a spirit as Lord Roberts, that verdict *is* singularly ungenerous; and, like all ungenerous estimates, it *is* unjust. To be "honourable, straightforward, resolute, and patriotic," is to satisfy some, at least,

[1] "Despatches," vol. vi. p. 389.

of the ideals of high and noble character. And Lord Roberts has read ill—or has forgotten—Wellington's career when he says that he never had to make a choice betwixt his personal interest and his duty, or would have sacrificed his interest to his duty.

Wellington was conscious, no doubt, of his own powers, and he had a good workman's ambition to be entrusted with great tasks; but in his whole career there is no hint of any ignoble concern for his own personal interests. "I have received from the Crown," he said, "numerous favours. I have never solicited one, I have never hinted, nor would any one of my friends or relatives venture to hint for me, a desire to receive one." "I make it a rule," he wrote again, "never to apply to anybody in any manner for anything for myself."[1]

He refused to accept a regiment of two battalions, though this meant much higher pay, rather than give up his old regiment, the 33rd. He accepted the rank of captain-general in the Spanish army, but declined to receive the pay attached to the post, as he declared he "would not become a burden upon the finances of Spain."

"I cannot understand," he wrote, "the feelings of an officer who is mortified by being given a rank below what he expected. In the course of my military life I have gone from the command of a brigade to that of a regiment, and from the command of an army to that of a brigade or regiment as I was ordered without feeling mortified."

[1] "Despatches," vol. ix. p. 2.

Wellington, indeed, is almost the only great soldier of supreme genius in history visibly without ambitions that were perilous to the state. He was magnificently free from that vanity which so often mars great intellectual gifts. A noble simplicity of temper was his constant characteristic. Lady Salisbury, in a conversation quoted by Sir Herbert Maxwell, asked him what he felt when he saw the Old Guard at Waterloo defeated.

"I can recollect no sensation of delight on that day," said Wellington, "if I experienced it. My thoughts were so entirely occupied with what was to be done . . . that I had not leisure for another idea." "Did you not think," asked Lady Salisbury, "how infinitely you had raised your name above every other?" "That is a feeling of vanity," was Wellington's reply; "one's first thought is for the public service." Lady Salisbury: "But there must be a lasting satisfaction in that feeling of superiority you always enjoy. It is not in human nature it should be otherwise." The Duke: "True. Still, I come constantly into contact with other persons on equal or inferior terms. Perhaps there is no man now existing who would like to meet me on a field of battle; in that line I am superior. But when the war is over and the troops disbanded, what is your great general more than anybody else? . . . I am necessarily inferior to every man in his own line, though I may excel him in others. I cannot saw and plane like a carpenter, or make shoes like a shoemaker, or understand cultivation like a farmer. Each of these, on his own ground, meets me on terms of superiority. I feel I am but a man."[1]

His "Despatches" are perhaps the most perfect and authentic reflection of Wellington's character. When Montaigne was told by Henri III. that he liked his book, "Then," was the reply, "Your

[1] Maxwell, vol. ii. p. 93.

Majesty must needs like me. My book is myself." That shrewd and gossiping Gascon has certainly put himself, as well as most of his neighbours, under the microscope in the famous essays. And Wellington's Despatches are Wellington himself translated into literary terms. Montaigne, with his peeping curiosity about himself and his neighbours, is for ever conscious of the presence of his reader. He is always posing. But the art in Wellington's Despatches is all the more profound because it is absolutely unconscious.

Wellington's Despatches are unhappily named. A "despatch" conveys the idea of a formal and official document, exhausted of all personal flavour. As a matter of fact, the "Despatches" consist of letters on every conceivable topic, addressed to all sorts of people, and all intended to produce some immediate effect in action. They give us the picture of a great soldier's brain, communicating the impulse of its plans and ideals to innumerable agents. All Wellington's ideals of conduct—of discipline, of citizenship, of honour and truth, as well as of soldiership—are here translated into exhortations, rebukes, counsels; so that we have not only the working mind of Wellington spread out before us, but his theory of life, his standard of right and wrong. The literary form is good, not because Wellington cared for literary grace, or possessed it, but because in these letters no super-

fluous word is ever used. Wellington no more wasted syllables than he did cartridges. And it may be safely said that in all these volumes there is no single touch of meanness. No unworthy motive peeps out. There is not a word that needs to be blotted.

The very atmosphere of the Despatches is as invigorating as a breeze from Alpine snows. Carlyle has written whole volumes of dithyrambic prose in honour of work; but there is more of the tonic that braces the mind for work in Wellington's Despatches than in all Carlyle has written. To read the Despatches is, for freshness, like a plunge into the salt, wind-swept sea. A matchless text-book of what may be called soldierly ethics might be compiled from these volumes. Wellington takes mere fighting courage in his soldiers for granted. It constitutes but a small part of a soldier's equipment. He says of his troops, in 1809:

"It is an unrivalled army for fighting, if the soldiers can only be kept in their ranks during the battle; but it wants more of the qualities indispensable to enable a general to bring them into the field fit to meet an enemy, or take advantage of a victory."

What a soldier needs, according to Wellington, is discipline, humanity, respect for order, the habit of obedience, loyalty to his comrades and his officers. He has no respect for either courage or cleverness which has not a moral root to it. Of a Spanish notable he says, "He is a very unprincipled

man, and when that is the case I can never think he can be a very able man."

To get the scale and quality of Wellington's character, we have only to put him side by side with Napoleon. Napoleon's egotism was stupendous and unashamed. He described himself as a "child of Destiny." "I must dazzle and astonish," he says. "At Arcola, with thirty-five cavalry, I won the battle." "They charge me," he said, "with the commission of great crimes. Men of my stamp do not commit crimes." They are, that is to say, above all moral restraints. He despised the men who fought and died for him. He "had made his marshals," he said, "of mud." "I know the depth and draft of water of every one of my generals." "He is," says Emerson, "a boundless liar. He sat in his premature old age, on his lonely island, coldly falsifying facts, and dates, and characters. . . . He would steal, slander, assassinate, drown, poison, as interest dictated. . . . He cheated at cards, he opened letters. . . . He fully deserves the epithet of *Jupiter Scapin*." "The fellow," in brief, to quote Wellington, "was no gentleman." Wellington, with his simplicity, his hate of exaggeration, his love of truth, his loyalty to duty, his scorn of every kind of meanness, is parted by whole horizons of moral worth from his great rival.

One blot on Wellington in after-life seems to be the manner in which he allowed his old comrades,

who had marched, and fought, and suffered with him, to drift out of the circle of his interests. The comradeship of the Peninsula and of Waterloo, it might be imagined, would have been held sacred. Men who had shared such perils together would find in that fact a bond stronger than any which civic life can weave. But it was not so for Wellington, and in the years of peace which followed his campaigns, his soldier-comrades seldom sat at his table. They drifted by degrees almost completely out of his circle, if they did not fade from his recollection. It must be remembered, however, that Wellington, when his campaigns were over, not only carried a tremendous burden of public and private affairs; he was a sort of councillor-general to the nation. Innumerable people of every rank wrote to him on every conceivable subject. His mere correspondence—that part of it which he carried on with his own hand—might have filled all the working hours of any ordinary human being.

Wellington, again, has suffered in reputation by the words—words which can neither be forgotten nor forgiven—which he used about the soldiers who won his victories for him. The army that won Waterloo he described as "infamously bad." "The very worst army ever got together," he told Palmerston. He was, no doubt, curiously, not to say unwisely, sparing of praise. He paid one

magnificent compliment to the army which invaded France; with it, he said, he "could have gone anywhere and done anything." But that compliment emerged incidentally, as a bit of evidence before a Royal Commission, and was offered years after that gallant force disappeared from the stage. He discussed his Peninsula army with Croker in amusing terms:

"I found the English regiments in the best humour when we were well supplied with beef; the Irish when we were in the wine countries; the Scotch when the dollars for pay came up. This looks like an epigram, but I assure you it was the fact, and quite perceptible. But we managed to reconcile all their tempers, and I will venture to say that in our late campaigns, and especially when we crossed the Pyrenees, there never was an army in the world in better spirits, better order, better discipline. We mended in discipline every campaign, until at last (smiling) I hope we were near perfect."

It must be remembered, that the cruel things Wellington said about his soldiers reach us only in the form of after-dinner gossip; and against such gossip Wellington himself has warned us:

"We converse loosely," he says. "We may say nothing that we do not think, or know to be true. But if I was to think that every word I ever say or write was to be brought before the Publick, I should hesitate before I dared to write or talk at all; and I should take care so to explain myself as that I could not be misunderstood."[1]

It must be remembered that for Wellington his

[1] Sir H. Maxwell, vol. ii. p. 284.

soldiers were the tools with which he worked, and a good workman is as severe in his judgment of his tools as he is of himself. Then to the severe things he said about his soldiers there was usually added some qualifying phrase, too often forgotten. Thus, after describing his Waterloo army as "an infamously bad one," he went on to say, "*however it beat them*"; and an army which beats its opponents can hardly be "infamously bad." "Our army," he told Stanhope, "is composed of the mere scum of the earth." Then he added, "It is wonderful that we should be able to make so much out of them afterwards." It is clear he believed that "much" *was* made out of this "scum of the earth" when it wore a soldier's uniform. No doubt the British army of that period, rich as it was in stubborn courage, lacked some other fine qualities. It took easily to plunder. Jackson, in his "Notes of a Staff Officer," tells how one officer, wise in battle-lore, who had served through all the Peninsular campaigns, used to say, "Give me young soldiers; old ones are apt to become too cunning." When Picton fell, shot while leading the charge on D'Erlon's columns, his body was robbed of watch and spectacles, before five minutes had passed, by some of his own veterans.

Wellington's attitude towards religion was curious. "I never heard him speak on religious topics," says Ellesmere; but he offers us second-

hand evidence—that of Arbuthnot—that Wellington "professed implicit and uncompromising belief in the doctrines of the Church"; the same sort of "belief," it may be suspected, as he felt, say, for the regulations of the War Office. It was official, and part of his professional duty. Gleig, who was an army chaplain, tells a little more on the subject. Of the Lord's Prayer, Wellington used to say that "it contained the sum-total of religion and of morals." When at Strathfieldsaye he regularly partook of the Lord's Supper, and, says Gleig, "it was a touching sight to see that great and venerable man kneeling devoutly before the altar-rails of the village church with the sunlight falling through the stained glass upon his head."

He usually went to sleep, it seems, during the sermon, and sometimes, Gleig reports, "snored audibly." He did swear, no doubt, and swear often, when in the army; he was no doubt affected by his environment; but in later years that evil habit died away. In a letter he wrote to Lady Webster a few hours after the battle of Waterloo, he ended by saying, "The Finger of Providence was upon me, and I escaped unhurt." Later, when this particular letter was to be included amongst his Despatches, he suggested that the phrase "the Finger of Providence" ought to be omitted "as containing nothing of public or military interest."

It is clear Wellington had more than the typical Englishman's shyness of religious topics.

Bishop Philpotts wrote to him in 1833 reminding him how he "might do honour to God, and by His grace much spiritual good to men, by setting the example of regular attendance at public worship." Wellington replied in a long letter published in the Civil Despatches, in which he declares he is particularly anxious to remove from his bishop's mind "the notion that I am a person without any sense of religion. If I am so," says Wellington,

"I am unpardonable." He goes on to say, "I do not make much show or boast on any subject, I never have done so. I am not a 'Bible Society man' upon principle, and I make no ostentatious display either of charity or of other Christian virtues, though I believe that, besides enormous sums given to hundreds and thousands who have positive claims upon me, there is not a charity of any description within my reach to which I am not a contributor."[1]

Wellington explains that he goes to church whenever his presence can operate as an example; but he explains that he is deaf, and cannot hear the sermon; that to sit for hours in a cold church would increase his deafness; and he adds:

"But excepting that duty, which I never fail to perform in the country, I don't know of any that I leave unperformed. There is room for amendment in every man, in me as well as in others; and there is nothing better calculated to inspire such amendment than such a letter as that from your Lordship."[2]

That letter is sufficient to show that of religion

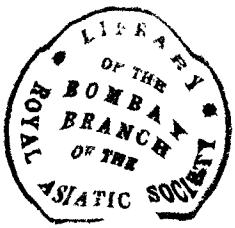
[1] "Civil Despatches," vol. viii. p. 147. [2] Ibid., p. 148.

on its mystical, or, rather, its spiritual, side—of its great emotions, its conception of the soul's personal relationship with God, and of man as a fallen creature of God, shut in within a circle of redemptive forces—Wellington knew nothing. His virtues were of the Stoic quality. Marcus Aurelius would have understood and envied them. Epictetus might have added to them a certain flush of tenderness. His life was rich in what may be called the working ethics of Christianity; but some forms of ethical duty he hardly understood. And he never learned that Christianity, though it includes ethics, is something more than even a system of ethics. It is a divine life in the soul.

"Man," says the author of "Urn Burial," "is a noble animal, splendid in ashes and pompous in the grave." And when in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral the Garter King-at-Arms recited the titles of "the late Most High, Mighty, and Most Noble Prince, Arthur, Duke and Marquis of Wellington," there followed a chain of titles such as perhaps has never before in history been granted to any one person, not being of royal blood. He was prince, and duke, in half-a-dozen kingdoms. He was captain-general of the Spanish army, marshal-general of the Portuguese army, Knight Grand Cross of no less than seventeen orders of knighthood, and field-marshal in the armies of all the great Powers.

But such glories are a dance of shadows, and they pass like shadows. Great men outlast their monuments, and Wellington rather gave dignity to that long array of titles than took dignity from them. For such a career as is here recorded Tennyson's words are the fittest close:

> "Speak no more of his renown,
> Lay your earthly fancies down,
> In the vast cathedral leave him,
> God accept him, Christ receive him."



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